University of Alberta

Women's Activism: A Case Study of Egypt

By

Shannon Michelle Mooney

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Department of Political Science

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Jan. 7, 1998

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to Mom, Dad, Leah and Colleen who, with love and patience, tolerated the mess of books and papers, my moodiness and frustration, and above all gave me the strength to believe that I could do this.

I would also like to mention Allison Betton, my best friend and brilliant editor, who supported me with her knowledge, imagination, and laughter.

And finally, Denis for his unfailing belief in my abilities.

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to contribute to an understanding of the roles, rights and status of the woman in Muslim society, and examine how women themselves are actively participating in the debates on their status. The introduction will provide a survey of the sources used in this thesis and will outline the general trends in Arab-Islamic scholarship over the last century. The second chapter will begin the investigation on women's status by focusing on the two foundational sources of Islam— the Koran and the hadith. Accompanying this, will be a general survey of interpretations of the Koran and hadith made by scholars and ideologues. Following from this analysis, Chapter Three will focus on one country, Egypt, to examine how these interpretations have taken shape in society. It will look at how Egyptian feminists, Islamists, nationalists, traditionalists and the state have interacted over the last century and a half. Chapter Four will continue this analysis by looking at the debates on women's status in contemporary times, focusing specifically on three areas: conservative and traditional Islamist gender ideology and its appeal for women; the response of feminists to state suppression and the growing popularity of Islamist groups; and a newly emerging liberal Islamist ideology. The primary goal of this thesis is to show that for over 150 years women have not only been the subjects, but also active participants in the discourses on their rights and status within society. But, in spite of this long history of women's activism, Egyptian society has maintained traditional views on women's rights, roles and status.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to determine the position of the woman in the Koran and hadith, and examine how these two foundational sources have been interpreted—by respected conservative and modernist scholars and feminists and Islamist women in the last century and in contemporary times in Egypt. A study such as this is important for several reasons. Firstly, as Islam spreads it is necessary to have an understanding of the foundational sources of such a widespread religion and how it perceives women's rights and status. Secondly, comprehending the interpretations of popular scholars and schemes of thought provides insight into different ideological trends that characterize, in an abstract sense, the diverse ways that Islam is lived in different regions of the world. It is important to keep in mind, though, that many of these interpreters elucidate an ideal that in most cases does not reflect reality. The importance here is the appeal of their ideals/ideology to certain sectors of society and how these elements of society attempt to implement this ideal. Thirdly, it will be important to understand how women, specifically feminists and Islamists, look to the Koran and hadith, deriving interpretations to define their own lives and legitimate their actions. In the end, the goal of this thesis is to contribute to an understanding of how Islam affects women's lives, and how women *use* Islam to affect their lives.

Before proceeding with this inquiry, though, it is important to briefly examine the themes and content of the scholarship that influenced the thesis. The literature used in this thesis is multidisciplinary, calling on historical, anthropological, sociological and political works, some from Western scholars, but predominantly from Arab and/or Islamic scholars. In conjunction with this, it is important to state from the outset that this is not a study of the general theories of feminism. Some of the materials

used may have been influenced by feminist theory, but it has been the decision of this author not to focus on that aspect of the scholarship, but instead look at the source material as self-statements about culture and religion. Secondly, this thesis will not examine *all* of the issues and problems facing women in the Arab/Islamic world, specifically issues of human rights (e.g. female circumcision). Doing justice to an examination of Muslim women's human rights would entail a great deal more time and research beyond the scope of this thesis. For those interested in specific issues of human rights, *Faith and Freedom: Women's Human Rights in the Muslim World* (1995) edited by Mahnaz Afkhami is an excellent starting point.

In 1994, two books were published, *The Price of Honor: Muslim Women Lift the Veil of Silence on the Islamic World* by Jan Goodwin and *Nine Parts of Desire: The Hidden World of Islamic Women* by Geraldine Brooks. Both women are journalists who have reported extensively on events in the Middle East. Struck by what they saw as the horrible oppression of Muslim women, which they believed would only get worse as Islamist movements spread, Goodwin and Brooks felt the need to publish these women's terrifying stories. Having read these books, one comes away angry, horrified and fascinated by the apparent cultural and religious injustices being done to these women. However it was difficult for me to believe that *all* Muslim women are oppressed, as is presented in these books, and I felt a desire to further examine the controversial issue of the status of the Muslim woman.

To begin this process of understanding more about Muslim women required a study of the foundational writings of Islam and how they portray a woman's role and status. Reading these texts was simple, as both the Koran and the hadith have been translated into English. Understanding their meaning was entirely a different story that

entailed a search for some form of interpretation. At this point, the realization dawned that there was no single definitive interpretation of the Koran and the hadith. Fazlur Rahman's book *Major Themes of Qur'an* (1980) proved to be quite helpful though. While not dealing extensively with women's status, it outlines the important themes in the Koran and clarifies the differences between modernist and traditionalist interpretations of women's status in the Koran and hadith.[1] Barbara Stowasser's book *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions and Interpretation* (1994) went several steps further, looking at the female characters in the Koran, the hadith and Islamic history, then examining how these women are viewed by conservatives (traditionalists), modernists and fundamentalists in the very general sense.[2] Stowasser's work is innovative as it is one of the few works in English that looks at women in sacred history and the meanings attached to their lives by the various interpretative tendencies. D.A Spellberg should also be mentioned for her work on the life and legacy of the prophet's most beloved and controversial wife, A'isha, in her book *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past* (1994).

Indigenous works on the interpretation of the rights and status accorded to women in the Koran and hadith abound. The father of Islamic modernism, Muhammad Abduh, wrote extensively on woman's status in connection with his theories on reconciling modernity and Islam at the turn of the century. Unfortunately Abduh's writings are only available in partial translation by authors like Charles C. Adams in *Islamic Modernism in Egypt: A Study of the Modern Reform Movement Inaugurated by*

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[1] Islamic modernism refers to the methodological process of interpretation using *ijtihad*, or individual reasoning, to determine the meaning of the Koran, first articulated by Muhammad Abduh as a way to reconcile the changing nature of society with Islam. Traditionalism (or conservativism) refers to institutional Islam, as practised over the centuries, which is based on the authority of the *umma*, or religious community. Stowasser. (1994), p.p. 5-6

[2] Fundamentalist (or Islamist, the term used predominantly in this thesis) refers to those who insist on the literal interpretation of scripture and hadith, in the process bypassing the work of centuries of theological-legal experts, that traditionalists would rely on. Stowasser. (1994), pp.6-7.

Muhammad Abduh (1933) and Malcolm Kerr in *Islamic Reform: the Political and Legal Theories of Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida* (1966).

Qasim Amin, a student of Muhammad Abduh's, made the status of Egyptian women the focus of his writings, claiming that seclusion and veiling indicated the backwardness of Egypt. His works, especially *The Liberation of Women* (1899- Arabic Edition), inaugurated the "Discourse of the Veil" whereby the oppression of Muslim women came to be symbolized by veiling and was viewed as proof by the colonialists and many Western educated Egyptians of the uncivilized and inferior nature of Muslim countries.

Amin's writings spawned a vehement response from Indian Muslim Abu al-A'la al-Maududi who wrote *Purdah and the Status of Women in Islam* (1939). His work examined in detail the corruption and evil inherent in Western society. Maududi presented the "Social System of Islam," as he interpreted it from the Koran and hadith, as the only way to protect devout Muslims from the same ruin. The foundation of this "Social System" was the seclusion, complete veiling and close guarding of women.

Maududi's writings inspired Islamists and traditionalists throughout the Muslim world including the primary ideologue for the Muslim Brotherhood, Sayyid Qutb. Qutb adopted Maududi's concept of an Islamic Social System and placed it in a much more political form—first with *Social Justice in Islam* (1949) and later in the very controversial publication, *Milestones* (1964). Qutb's writings have remained very influential within Islamist circles over the last several decades.

Indigenous feminist scholarship interpreting the foundational sources of Islam has also been published. Since the 1970s a number of Muslim feminists have attempted a more progressive reading of the Koran, hadith and sacred history. This has been in

response to the growing popularity of the Islamist movement and to foreign criticism claiming that Islam is oppressive towards women. Three examples of this, all translated into English, are Azizah al-Hibri's article *A Study of Islamic Herstory or How did we ever get into this mess*? (1982), Nawal al-Saadawi's article *Woman and Islam*, and the book *Qur'an and Woman* (1992) by Amina Wadud-Muhsin. All three women use the Koran as the focus of their study, placing the Koranic revelations within their historical context and providing alternative, more "woman-friendly" interpretations.

More recently Fatima Mernissi and Leila Ahmed have published works which examine both the Koran and hadith. In *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist's Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam* (1987- French Edition), Mernissi attempts to recapture a bygone age when Islam meant democracy, equality and spirituality for all. The most interesting section of her book discusses hadith that have traditionally been used to denigrate women. It is a fascinating attempt to deconstruct these hadith by first contextualising them and second, questioning the intentions of the persons who first quoted them. To date, no other scholar has attempted this with these misogynistic hadith. Leila Ahmed is another scholar who takes aim at those claiming that Islam is inherently oppressive to women. In *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of A Modern Debate* (1992), she writes a complete history of the development of the discourses on women and Islam, spanning the pre-Islamic Middle East through to the contemporary emergence of the Islamist movement. All of the scholars mentioned have decidedly separated patriarchy from Islam and claim that women's complete equality with man was intended from the beginning. The egotism of contemporary Islam is due to the infiltration of cultural practices that have no true basis in Islam. Unfortunately, over the centuries the male elite has given these same practices religious sanction.

At the other end of this spectrum are Arab feminists who claim that Islam is intrinsically patriarchal and inimical to women's rights. This is exemplified in Fatna Sabbah's book *Woman in the Muslim Unconscious* (1984). She claims that the ideal of female beauty in Islam is obedience, silence, immobility, and passivity, which is a reflection of man's relationship with God.

While scholarship on the basic sources of Islam as they relate to women is crucial, it is also necessary to take into consideration other factors such as the relationship between the nature of state projects, Islam and the position and activities of women. Both Arab and Western scholars have published in this area. Lebanese Christian Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad's article *Islam, Women and Revolution in Twentieth Century Arab Thought* (1985) is an excellent study of three ideologies dominating Egyptian political history – nationalism, socialism, and Islamism, that have profoundly influenced women's status, roles and goals. Margot Badran's piece *Competing Agendas : Feminists, Islam and the State in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Egypt* (1991), discusses how 'the woman question' has been contested territory involving feminists, Islamists *and* the state. Badran presents women as taking active roles in the discourses. Mervat Hatem has also contributed towards the discussion by challenging the notion that secularism has been only beneficial for women in her article *Egyptian Discourses on Gender and Political liberalization: Do Secularist and Islamist Views Really Differ?* (1994). Hatem compares Egyptian Islamist and secularist views on women's roles and finds the centrality of domesticity is common to both.

Other scholars have questioned the role that Islam actually plays in determining a woman's status. Valentine M. Moghadam's book *Modernizing Women : Gender and Social Change in the Middle East* (1993) is a recent publication that has

attempted to point out the salience of other structural determinants of women's status in society, other than religion, which she contends has been over-emphasized. Her book is an exploration of the causes, nature and direction of change that have affected women's status and social positions, particularly the economic, political and cultural dimensions. It is an important attempt to move beyond Islam as *the* determining factor and instead make it *a* factor in shaping women's status.

Some of the most important work being done right now on Egyptian women is by Margot Badran. In *The Origins of Feminism* (1989), she successfully challenges the notion that the founder of Egyptian feminism was Qasim Amin, and instead investigates women's early memoirs to discover an indigenous feminist consciousness developing well before Amin's publication of *The Liberation of Women*. In conjunction with this, is a book Badran edited with Miriam Cooke on Arab feminist writing in the last century, titled *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing* (1990). It is a valuable contribution to understanding the nature and origins of Arab feminism. Beth Baron has also attempted to recover the history of the early feminist movement in *The Women's Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society and the Press* (1994). Her book traces the development of the women's press in the first half of this century, and the difficulties women faced in publishing their works and publicly debating the issues concerning them.

As the Islamist movement continues to grow, appealing to larger sectors of society, it has become very important to document this work. A great deal of this scholarship has detailed how the Islamist movement is subverting women's rights in the Muslim world as seen in Fatima Mernissi's article *Muslim Women and Fundamentalism* (1988). Her belief is that as women gain education and access to work, they are threatening the traditional boundaries between men and women thus challenging men's

domination. The more this happens, and the more women take off the veil, the greater the reaction against them by the Islamists.

An emerging area of research, which takes a different approach, crucial to women's studies in the Middle East, is examining women's activities within Islamist organizations and identifying the reasons that women adhere to Islamist ideology as exemplified by the large number of women donning the hijab. Fadwa el Guindi first discussed the increasing number of women wearing the hijab in her article *Veiling Infitah With Muslim Ethic: Egypt's contemporary Islamic Movement* (1981). El Guindi presents the Islamist movement as a creative alternative to institutional Islam, citing its two fundamental features, egalitarianism and sex segregation as attractive to the lower to lower-middle class population in an overcrowded Cairo.[3] Another work, entitled *Revealing Reveiling: Islamist Gender Ideology in Egypt* (1992) by Sherifa Zuhur, is the result of various surveys and interviews she conducted with women, veiled and unveiled in Egypt. The study called on women to describe their own value systems, a valuable research method only in use for the last couple decades. What is special about Zuhur's work is her examination of all different socioeconomic backgrounds and how she correlates them with religiopolitical beliefs. Zuhur supplements her surveys with the non-academic work of Islamist women like the popular Zaynab al-Ghazali.

Najib Ghadbian's article *Islamist and Women in the Arab World : From Reaction to Reform?* examines much of the same material but from within a larger context of different countries. What is especially interesting in Ghadbian's work is his clear belief that women are choosing to join Islamist movements because it empowers

[3] See also Azzam, Maha. "Gender and the Politics of Religion in the Middle East," *Feminism and Islam: Legal and Literary Perspectives.* Mai Yamani, ed., (New York: New York University Press, 1996), pp. 217-230.

them, which clearly contradicts the writings of other scholars. Margot Badran has further contributed to this understanding of the nature of women's activities in both the Islamist movement and the feminist movement in her 1994 article *Gender Activism: Feminists and Islamists in Egypt*. She suggests that there are commonalties in the activism of feminists and female Islamists, despite an ideological gap separating them.

While these sources appear to cover large areas of research, there are in fact few of them. Besides Margot Badran's work, there has been very little research into indigenous origins of feminism or activities that reflect an emerging feminist consciousness. The present day activities of feminists have also been neglected. This may be out of the fear that researchers could be accused of forcing Western values onto other cultures by searching for what is often considered a solely Western movement.

Research into Islamist women is also lacking. The assumption that women are victims of Islamist movements and not actors within has permeated much scholarship. The works of Fadwa el Guindi, Najib Ghadbian, Maha Azzam, Sherifa Zuhur, Valentine Moghadam and Margot Badran represent the scarce amount available. Very little is actually known about the individual activities of Islamist women.

Acknowledging the fact that research is lacking in many areas, this thesis hopes to contribute to this understanding of women's status, roles, and activities in Islam/Muslim society. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter Two begins this inquiry by examining the foundational sources of Islam—the Koran and the hadith. In conjunction with this, some general trends in interpretation will be presented by such ideologues as Abul A'la al-Maududi and Sayyid Qutb, and scholars like Fazlur Rahman, Muhammad Abduh and Fatima Mernissi. Chapter Three places this study within the context of Egypt, a dynamic and troubled country, and looks at how modernists,

feminists, nationalists, Islamists and the state have all interacted over the last century. It will examine how the discourses on woman developed and how women have not only been the subjects, but also active participants. Chapter Four studies the more conservative and traditional Islamist gender ideology *and* the newly emerging perspectives of Islamists. As feminists continue to influence women, it is therefore necessary to discuss the interactions between Islamists and feminists in contemporary Egypt. The question this thesis asks, and hopes to discover an answer to is, in what ways are women active in promoting their rights and does Islam suppress these interests or further them?

Chapter 2: The Scriptural and Interpretative Framework

Introduction

The purpose of the first part of this thesis is to examine the position of the woman in Islam. To create this picture, there are three aspects of the woman that will be analysed: her individual relationship with God and spiritual equality with man; her roles in society beyond the family, which include such issues as providing witness, participating in war and taking on leadership roles; and finally her roles and obligations within the family. It was in the area of marital relations and the conduct of women that Islam introduced the greatest reform, with approximately 80 percent of Koranic rulings dealing with this subject matter.[1] To provide a complete analysis of the woman in these three areas of life, four components must be examined.

The first component is the Koran, the fundamental source of the Islamic religion.[2] It is a compilation of the messages revealed to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel. The Koran puts forth an ideal social paradigm to which all Muslims should aspire. It was and still is a political, social, spiritual and intellectual catalyst for change. This religious and political revolution spread with relative speed throughout the Middle East, and later throughout much of the world. According to Muslim tradition, the assembling of the Koran began with the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632, though some evidence indicates that certain verses were compiled while he was alive.[3] The Koran will form the base on which the next three components will be built.

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[1] Ahmed, Leila. "Women and the Advent of Islam," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, (*Vol. II*, No. 4, 1986), p. 667.

[2] The Koranic citations and references are from: *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*, Pickthall, Marmaduke, trans., (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1992).

[3] Arkoun, Mohammed. *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers*. (Colorado: Westview Press, 1994), p. 35.

The second fundamental text in Islam is the hadith. The hadith is looked upon as an explanatory text, further clarifying aspects of the Koran. As divine inspiration always drove the Prophet, the Companions of the Prophet paid close attention to what he said. After the Prophet's death, intense research was put into the collecting and recording of these sayings. The hadith took longer to compile than the Koran, with authenticated sayings only assembled by the ninth century. The selection and editing process of the utterances resulted in many controversies between the three Muslim communities: the Sunni, the Twelver Shi'a, and the Khariji.[4] For the purposes of this paper, reference will be made only to al-Bukhari's compilation, which is adhered to by the largest group of Muslims, the Sunni.[5]

Muhammad's revelations were not received into a cultural vacuum. Islam was built upon a well-established sociological framework, including attitudes, customs, and traditions of the past. To fully comprehend the nature of the Koranic rulings, it is helpful to have an understanding of society before the revelations. A brief summary of women's roles and rights as they pertain will accompany certain sections with the intention of clarifying Islam's impact and answering the question whether Islam *improved* the condition of the woman in Arabian society.

The Koran and hadith are over thirteen hundred years old and neither can be considered explicit law books.[6] The need for clarity has resulted in many distinct interpretations by theologians, scholars, and activists and the formation of different schools of law. To provide a complete picture of the woman in Islam, it is insufficient to

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[4] *Ibid.*, p. 45.

[5] *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih al-Bukhari*, 9 vols., Muhammad M. Khan, trans., (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1979).

[6] Esposito, John L. *Women In Muslim Family Law*. (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1982), p. 2.

look only at the scripture. The fourth component will consist of an analysis of these interpretations.

Using the four components outlined above, it is hoped that this chapter will compose a picture of the woman in Islam as an individual and as a member of society, both within and separate from the family. It is important to note the impossibility of addressing all material. The immediate goal, therefore, is to provide a survey of available information.

Woman As An Individual

The Koran puts forth a picture of the woman as having an individual relationship with God. She is presented simply as a believer, equal to man in her duties to and rewards from God. It is her right to have this relationship and just like man she has many obligations to fulfil:

> And their Lord hath heard them (and He saith): Lo! I suffer not the work of any worker, male or female, to be lost. Ye proceed one from another (3:195). . . And whoso doeth good works, whether of male or female, and he (or she) is a believer, such will enter paradise and they will not be wronged by the dint in a date-stone (4:124). . . Lo! Men who surrender unto Allah, and women who surrender, and men who believe and women who believe, and men who obey and women who obey, and men who speak the truth and women who speak the truth, and men who persevere (in righteousness) and women who persevere, and men who are humble and women who are humble, and men who give alms and women who give alms, and men who fast and women who fast, and men who guard their modesty and women who guard (their modesty), and men who remember Allah much and women who remember - Allah hath prepared for them forgiveness and vast reward(33:35).

The Koran does not distinguish between man and woman as one being superior to the other. Both are individuals with responsibilities and capacities.[7] These verses hold an

[7] Wadud-Muhsin, Amina. *Qur'an and Woman*. (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Fajar Bakti Sdn. Bhd., 1992), p. 34.

enormous amount of information, based on what they *do not* say. The work of a man and woman is considered of equal importance regardless of the nature of the work, if it is in the interest of Allah. There are no particular instructions as to what this work must be, no areas into which a woman are told not to venture. Secondly, a man must guard their modesty, just as woman must. Yet there are no specifications as to how this should be accomplished, it merely states that both must observe modesty.

The rewards in heaven for works on earth are also non-discriminatory:

> But as for those who believe and do good works We shall bring them into gardens underneath which rivers flow, wherein they will abide for ever (4:122). . . Allah promiseth to the believers, men and women, Gardens underneath which rivers flow(9:72).

None of these verses distinguish woman as inferior to man in terms of intellect, spirituality, or capacity to fulfil obligations, religious or otherwise. There is only one verse that discusses how men and women will be judged:

> O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another. Lo! the noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct (49:13).

In addition to equality in work, responsibilities, and commitments to God, one other crucial event is mentioned: birth (creation). Woman is created alongside man, in order that they may be partners to each other:

> O mankind! Be careful of your duty to your Lord Who created you from a single cell and from it created its mate and from them twain hath spread abroad a multitude of men and women(4:1). . . Ye proceed one from another(3:195).

This view is also put forth in the verses regarding Creation. Unlike the Judeo-Christian Bible and hadith literature, the Koran does not describe woman as having been created from the rib of man, nor is she exclusively responsible for the banishment from the

Garden. Various Suras place woman at different points in the story of Creation, some are centred only around Adam—God's warning, Satan's temptation, and God's forgiveness—other verses have Hawwa and Adam as equal participants in the fall from the Garden.[8]

An examination of hadith literature recounts a different story, where she is accused of tempting Adam to take the fruit, a situation reminiscent of the Biblical story. She supposedly brought wine, a forbidden substance, into the Garden, enticed him into drinking it, and diminished his rational powers. Another version claims that Satan incited Adam's desire for Hawwa at which point she refused to gratify him until he ate the fruit. In the end, God singles Hawwa out for additional punishment, including menstruation and pregnancy.[9]

Other hadith literature re-emphasises this concept of a woman's defectiveness in her relationship with God:

> Allah's Apostle once said to a group of women: 'I have not seen any one more deficient in intelligence and religion than you. A cautious, sensible man could be led astray by some of you.' The women asked: 'O Allah's Apostle, what is deficient in our intelligence and religion?' He said: 'Is not the evidence of two women equal to the witness of one man?' They replied in the affirmative. He said: 'This is the deficiency of your intelligence. . . 'Isn't it true that a woman can neither pray nor fast during her menses?' The women replied in the affirmative. He said: 'This is the deficiency in your religion.[10]

This hadith has been interpreted as proof of woman's inherent inferiority in religion and intellect, despite the Koranic verses which proclaim the equality of man and woman.

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[8] Stowasser, Barbara Freyer. *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretations.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 27.

[9] Zuhur. Sherifa. *Revealing Reveiling: Islamist Gender Ideology in Contemporary Egypt.* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), p. 31.

[10] Sahih al-Bukhari., Vol. 1, Book VI, Ch. 8.

For those giving credence to this hadith, a Koranic verse regarding menstruation further supports this view:

> They question thee (O Muhammad) concerning menstruation. Say: It is an illness, so let women alone at such times and go not in unto them till they are cleansed. And when they have purified them selves, then go in unto them as Allah hath enjoined upon you (2:222).

Even though the verse does not state a woman cannot pray or fast while menstruating, it has been interpreted that she is unclean and therefore should not engage in religious obligations. The Koran states at frequent intervals that a woman is equal to man in her relationship with God, yet hadith and interpretation dispute this.

The emphasis placed on hadith literature within the Islamic community is surpassed only by the importance of the Koran. Aside from the Koran, hadith literature has provided much of the material from which Islamic law has been derived.[11] To date, there has not been a general review of the different compilations, with each community (Sunni, Shia and Khariji) viewing their selected compilation as authentic and considering the matter closed. Some individual scholars, though, have questioned the reliability and authenticity of certain hadith. Joseph Schacht, in his book *Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* concluded that the majority of hadith could not be considered authentic, and that very little information about the Prophet, outside of the Koran, was handed down through the generations. He maintains that the use of the hadith was to give legal authority to later customary practices and traditions. [12]

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[11] Esposito. (1982), p. 111.
[12] Esposito (1982) on Schacht. p.112

In her study of several misogynistic hadith[13], Fatima Mernissi examines the historical context during which they were transmitted and the intentions and background of the transmitter. Her intent is to question the authenticity of these hadith, as she believes that they contradict the spirit of the Koran and the Prophet.

While the Koran gives no indication that it places different inherent values on man or woman, various interpretative tendencies have. Many of the interpreters turn to the more specific verses in the Koran and chapters in the hadith that outline a woman's rights and obligations to support this view of woman's inferiority. The following two sections will outline these verses in the Koran and chapters in the hadith and give history and interpretation to provide context and clarity.

Woman as a Member of Society: Outside the Family

The Women's Oath of Allegiance to the Community

It is as a member of society that the Koranic revelations become more specific regarding the conduct of woman. The woman's oath of allegiance is of particular interest in this case:

> O Prophet! If believing women come unto thee, taking oath of allegiance unto thee that they will ascribe no thing as partner unto Allah, and will neither steal nor commit adultery nor kill their children, nor produce any lie that they have devised between their hands and feet, nor disobey thee in what is right, then accept their allegiance and ask Allah to forgive them. Lo! Allah is Forgiving, Merciful(60:12).

[13] Specifically, "Those who entrust their affairs to a woman will never know prosperity", and "The Prophet said that the dog, the ass, and woman interrupt prayer if they pass in front of the believer, interposing themselves between him and the qibla [the direction a Muslim prays facing Mecca]" Mernissi, Fatima. *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam.* Mary Jo Lakeland, trans., (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1991), p. 49, 64.

Surah LX sets down the terms with which the community was to deal with women who came to them as fugitives from disbelieving tribes. As long as they were not criminals or fleeing from a family quarrel, and appeared to be sincere converts, they were to be welcomed into the community of believers. In return for these women, the Muslims were to pay an indemnity to the tribe from which these women came.[14] The man's oath of allegiance was identical to the woman's with the single exception of the duty of defense. There is no indication in the verse that a woman had to have male sponsorship or permission to take the oath. This verse was (and is) a convincing indication that women were viewed as having independent personalities. In Arabian society, both during the pre-Islamic era and at the time of revelation, women were generally seen as prizes of warfare, having little control over their own lives.[15] This ability to choose which community they wished to belong to indicates a powerful right to self-determination.

Few scholars or theologians pay much attention to this verse, which is interesting as it elucidates the values that the Koran considers the most important. The implications for this are enormous. The oath was not only a verbal contract, but also a political statement. As an individual, a woman had to have been viewed as possessing enough legal and political status to determine their own future and take the oath.

Further to this is a verse which establishes the goals of the community and the responsibilities man and woman have to each other:

> And the believers, men and women, are protecting friends one of another; they enjoin the right and forbid the wrong, and they establish worship and they pay the poor-due, and they obey Allah and His messenger. As for these, Allah will have mercy on them. . .(9:71)

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[14] Pickthall, Mohammad. *Introduction to Surah LX, The Meaning of the Glorious Koran.* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1992), p. 578.

[15] Abbott, Nabia. "Women and the State on the Eve of Islam," *The Journal of American Semitic Languages.* (*Vol. 58*, 1941), p. 262.

There are no words which indicate the superiority of one individual over the other, only encouragement to become allies to support each other. The picture that emerges is one of interdependence for the survival of the community.

Witness

Another consideration is that of women acting as witnesses:

> When ye contract a debt for a fixed term, record it in writing . . . and call to witness, from among your men, two witnesses. And if two men be not (at hand) then a man and two women of such as ye approve as witnesses, so that if one erreth (through forgetfulness) the other will remember . . . (2:282)

Upon first reading, the verse appears to be quite clear, two women equal one man when giving witness. It is also important to note that the language used refers to the ratio of witnesses required for a *financial* transaction. Several other verses not dealing with debt mention the need for witnesses and do not indicate a preference for men or women or the number required. (4:6,15 and 24:4) Despite these facts, scholars have come up with different meanings for the verse.

Contemporary Islamic scholar Fazlur Rahman points out the fact that since women were not well versed in dealing with credit, this was a reasonable edict. When a woman improved her power of memory concerning financial matters, which would be for the betterment of society, her evidence would be equal to that of a man. He views the verse as an encouragement for women to become "conversant with such matters". He also mentions that while the verse deals with a specific situation, unfortunately, traditionalist interpretation has applied it universally to all occasions when a woman is to give evidence.[16]

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[16] Rahman. Fazlur. *Major Themes of the Qur'an.* (Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980), p. 49.

Sayyid Qutb, an ideologue for the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, takes a different position, relating more to the inherent differences in nature he sees between man and woman. He claims that the need for two women in the place of one man is not a case of discrimination. As the woman's primary role is within her family, she does not develop the intellectual capacities necessary to be the sole witness. Qutb generalises, saying that her growth is more in the direction of emotions and passions. If she is carried away by her emotions, another woman is there to remind her of her duty.[17] Qutb believes that this Koranic legislation applies to all the circumstances when a woman may be called upon to give evidence, not only in financial transactions. The argument that a woman is not intellectually developed enough to be a sole witness is a common belief within the conservative/fundamentalist communities.

Amina Wadud-Muhsin takes a slightly different position from both men. She makes the interesting point that in a society where a woman could be easily coerced, if there were two female witnesses, one could back the other's testimony. The idea is that one woman would support the other allowing for a united front against the opposing and more intimidating side.[18] Despite this broad spectrum of interpretations, a higher social regard for men in worldly affairs has prevailed. The belief that women are unreliable as witnesses has resulted in Islamic laws that require two women to equal one man's testimony.[19]

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[17] Qutb, Sayyid. *Social Justice in Islam*. (New York: Octagon Books, 1970), p. 51.
[18] Wadud-Muhsin., p. 86.
[19] Esposito. (1982), p. 17.

Warfare

Another area in which women interacted in society was during war. Several verses mention warfare, none of which states that it is inappropriate for her to venture out into what has often been viewed as a predominantly male occupation:

> Fight in the way of Allah against those who fight agins̱t you, but begin not hostilities (2:190). . . Go forth, light-armed and heavy-armed, and strive with your wealth and your lives in the way of Allah! (9:41)

Hadith literature, on several occasions, depicts women as participating in war. The Prophet's own wives were reported to have been present bringing water to the warriors, during the Battle of Uhud.[20] At the same time, other women were reported to have treated the wounded and brought back the bodies of the dead.[21] While the women may not have done any actual fighting, they were not shut in or hidden away during a battle; rather, they performed many vital tasks.

Woman's participation in war is a continuation from pre-Islamic times. Research has shown that women were just as active in war as men. Records indicate that they provided an informal intelligence service, organised and ran a primitive Red Cross, ministered to the wounded, supplied provisions, and dispatched the wounded enemy.[22] In terms of actual fighting, there are a few accounts of women leading armies. Perhaps the most famous story of a woman leading an army was A'isha's involvement at the Battle of the Camel. She supported 'Uthman's claim to the Caliphate, after Muhammad's death. This was in direct opposition to Ali, Muhammad's son-in-law. Rallying many soldiers,

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[20] Sahih al-Bukhari. Vol.4, Book LII, Chp. 65.
[21] *Ibid.*, Chp. 67-68.
[22] Abbott., p.262.

she met Ali's forces, only to be defeated. On her deathbed she would sorely regret her involvement in the first fitnah.[23]

The reaction to A'isha's involvement in the civil war was varied. She was praised as the wife of the Prophet and blamed for her political actions as his widow. In the end her entanglement evolved into a cultural construct that defined all women as threats to the maintenance of Islamic political order. This belief was and is supported by one of the more well known hadith. It was recounted by Abu Bakra at the time of the Fitnah that, "those who entrust their affairs to a woman will never know prosperity."[24] This argument against woman's participation in politics usually finds a place in most Islamist/traditionalist literature.

What is commonly discounted in most interpretations was that A'isha managed to gather an entire army under her supervision and lead it into battle—no small feat. Most literature, which tends to be fairly judgemental, only recounts her failure on the battlefield, criticising her for becoming involved. What is so often forgotten is that when everyone else backed down, she stood up to Ali, gaining a huge amount of support in the process.

Female Leadership

In direct contrast to this hadith and general interpretation that women should not be involved in politics is the Koranic story of Bilqis, the queen of Sheba. The verses which recount her story (27:23-44) praise both her political astuteness and her piety. The verses claim that Bilqis was powerful, well provided for, and had a magnificent throne, yet she worshipped the sun. King Solomon sent her a letter, encouraging her to convert

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[23] Fitnah refers to a political and social schism and also to the effect of a beautiful woman. Zuhur., p. 36 and Stowasser. (1994), p. 116.

[24] Sahih al-Bukhari as quoted in Mernissi. (1991), p. 1.

to Islam. She does so, proclaiming "My Lord! Lo! I have wronged myself, and I surrender with Solomon unto Allah, the Lord of the Worlds."(27:44) She is a woman, she has wisdom, power, authority and wealth, and at no point does the Koran state that this is wrong.

The picture of the woman in society that has emerged is a contradictory one. On one hand, she has a powerful political status, indicated by her right to independently take the oath of allegiance and provide witness. Second, there are multiple examples of women participating in the seemingly male domain of warfare. Third, there is the Koranic example of Bilqis, a powerful, respected female ruler. In direct contradiction to this is the hadith recounted by Abu Bakra, forever recited by men whose goal it is to prevent women from aspiring to the "male" domain of politics and public life. This is despite the many examples of women who fought beside their men and lead armies and nations. The next section will shed light on another area of woman's existence, ostensibly the "proper" domain for woman: the family.

Woman in Society: The Family

The primary purpose of the Koran was to establish a just social order on earth. In pre-Islamic times, marriage does not appear to have been a formal institution, entailing little stability for anyone involved. This reflected the situation of societies at this time, most of which were characterised by economic disequilibrium and social inequalities.[25] While the Koran attempted to address the abuses taking place in society in general, women, children, and orphans were in the most danger of mistreatment. The Koran addressed these abuses by making provisions within a new family unit for those

[25] Rahman, p. 38.

less fortunate, in the process creating a new relationship between men and women. An Arabian nuclear family was created with the extended families providing support. The family became a powerful bulwark on which to base the new community of believers.

Marriage was considered to be the best of all states for man. Unlike in Christianity, abstinence was not encouraged, unless of course one was unmarried:

> Whosoever is able to marry, should marry, for that will help him to lower his gaze and guard his modesty (i.e., his private parts from committing illegal sexual intercourse, etc.)[26]

While marriage is considered a social contract, it should also be looked upon as a partnership in which there should be at the very least politeness and kindness:

> ...But consort with them in kindness, for if ye hate them [women] it may happen that ye hate a thing wherein Allah hath placed much good(4:19).

Various verses also indicate that marriage was to provide both mental and physical comfort for both husband and wife:

> ...They are raiment for you and ye are raiment for them...(2:187)

> [regarding a man who fasted and prayed all night]...Do not do that!...Your body has a right over you, your eyes have a right over you and your wife has a right over you.[27]

Marriage was necessary for the community of believers to grow. By turning marriage into a social and legal contract, it was made binding on both parties and was not to be taken lightly. But the Koran also recognises that a marriage must fulfil the emotional needs of the husband and wife and encourages them to look to each other for support and kindness.

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[26] Sahih al-Bukhari. Vol. 7, Book LXII, Chp. 2.
[27] *Ibid.*, Chp. 90.

Rights and Obligations of the Husband and Wife

Within the family unit, a man and woman have mutual, though not identical, obligations. A husband's duty was to treat his wife kindly and provide for her needs:

> . . . And they (women) have rights similar to those (of men) over them in kindness, and men are a degree above them.(2:228). . . They are raiment for you and you are raiment for them.(2:187)

Hadith literature also exhorts man to be polite and kind to woman and to take care of them, claiming that she is like a crooked rib and if a man tries to straighten a woman he will break her.[28] Other chapters in al-Bukhari point out man's responsibility to protect the women in his family and provide food, clothing, and shelter.[29] A woman is not required to contribute anything to the expenses of the household, as she has her own right to property and cannot be dictated to on how to dispense of her funds.[30]

Based on Islamic law this maintenance must continue unless she refuses him conjugal rights or is otherwise disobedient, since in return for this maintenance she owes him faithfulness and obedience. If her behaviour is caused by the withholding of her dowry or the necessity of her leaving due to cruel treatment, a man must still provide for her.[31] The husband also has the right to discipline his wife:

> . . . As for those from whom ye fear rebellion, admonish them and banish them to beds apart, and scourge them. Then if they obey you, seek not at way against them . . .(4:34)

Rebellion may include failing to beautify herself if her husband requests it, refusing to have intercourse, not offering prayer, and leaving the house without permission.[32]

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[28] *Ibid.*, Ch. 80-81.
[29] Sahih al-Bukhari, Vol. 7, Book LXII, Ch. 92. and Vol. 7, Book LXIV, Ch. 2.
[30] Qureshi, Saleem. "The Muslim Family: The Scriptural Framework," *Muslim Families in North America.* E.H. Waugh, *et. al.* eds. (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1991), p.49.
[31] Esposito. (1982), p. 26.
[32] Qureshi., p. 50.

Though several hadith set down the limits of this discipline, as apparently the idea is not necessarily to inflict pain: The Prophet said, "None of you should flog his wife as he flogs a slave."[33]

If a man does not sufficiently provide for his family, then his wife has the right to "Take what is sufficient (for you) and your children, and the amount should be just and reasonable."[34] A woman's rights and obligations are often viewed in light of this very controversial verse:

> Men are in charge of women, because the Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property (for the support of women). So good women are obedient, guarding in secret that which Allah hath guarded. . . (4:34)

In return for financial security, a wife's primary obligations are obedience, taking care of his wealth and property, and looking after his children.[35] She must also be a willing sexual partner as is seen in Sura Two, verse 223, "Your women are tilth for you (to cultivate) so go to your tilth as ye will. . ." A woman must dwell with her husband wherever he chooses to live.[36] A man is also permitted to restrain his wife's movements and prevent her from showing herself in public.[37] The only exception to this is if she wishes to visit her parents or acquire religious instruction.[38]

The section of the verse regarding man's superiority has been the subject of many debates. Is man superior only in the functional sense as a modernist like Fazlur Rahman would argue? He states that as men are charged with earning money and spending it on women, their superiority is only functional, not inherent. If a woman

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[33] Sahih al-Bukhari., Vol.7, Book LXII, Ch. 94.
[34] *Ibid.*, Book LXIV, Ch. 9.
[35] *Ibid.*, Ch. 10, 12.
[36] Qureshi, p. 49.
[37] Esposito. (1982), p.23.
[38] Qureshi., p. 49.

becomes economically sufficient and contributes to household expenses, the male's superiority would be reduced, "since *as a human,* he has no superiority over his wife." [39]

This section has outlined the basic rights and obligations of a husband and wife. There are important issues which merit further analysis. The following will address modesty and privacy, polygamy, divorce, dower and inheritance.

Privacy and Modesty

The creation of the family unit resulted in an increased need for privacy. A community in the Arabian desert would have consisted of a number of tents in fairly close proximity and a very relaxed "social style", in which privacy would have been difficult to attain.[40] It appears that Muhammad's own difficulties finding peace and quiet from his followers who constantly barraged him with requests, resulted in numerous Koranic verses:

> O ye who believe! Enter not houses other than you own without first announcing your presence and invoking peace upon the folk thereof. . . And if ye find no one therein, still enter not until permission hath been given. And if it be said unto you: Go away again, then go away, for it is purer for you. . . (24:27-28) . . . O ye who believe! Enter not the dwellings of the Prophet for a meal without waiting for a proper time unless permission be granted you. But if ye are invited, enter, and, when your meal has ended disperse. . . (33:53)

Modesty went hand in hand with this desire for privacy. As stated before, modesty is required from both male and female, ". . . and men who guard their modesty and women who guard their modesty. . .Allah hath prepared for them forgiveness and vast reward."(33:35) Despite this, the verses regarding modesty are far more often directed at women:

> And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and be modest, and to display of their adornments only that which is apparent, and to draw their

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[39] Rahman, p.49.
[40] Qureshi, p.40.

> veils over their bosoms, and not to reveal their adornment save to their own husbands...(24:31)

The wives of the Prophet were given even more explicit instructions, even to the point of not leaving their houses:

> ...O Wives of the Prophet! Ye are not like other women...And stay in your houses. Bedizen not yourselves with the bedizenment of the Time of Ignorance...(33:32-33) ...And when ye ask of them (the wives of the Prophet) anything, ask it of them from behind a curtain. That is purer for your hearts and their hearts...(33:53) ...O' Prophet! Tell thy wives and they daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks round them (when they go abroad). That will be better, so that they may be recognised and not annoyed...(33:59)

These verses reflect the growth of the community. Muhammad probably felt the need to create some distance between his family and the groups of people demanding his attention. In the beginning, then, Muhammad's wives were the only ones to experience veiling and seclusion in the first community.[41]

Veiling and seclusion were not unheard of before Islam. It was apparently in use in several societies. Segregation of the sexes and use of the veil were heavily in evidence in the Christian Middle East and Mediterranean regions. It was not until after Muhammad's death, and the absorption of new territories, that veiling became a common practice, though predominantly by the upper class Muslim women.[42] In the last century and a half, the practice of veiling has become a contentious issue with various segments of society arguing its merits and demerits.

Traditionalists and fundamentalists look to the same verses regarding modesty to support their claims that women should at the very least be veiled, although

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[41] Ahmed. Leila. *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 55.
[42] *Ibid.*, p. 5.

ideally the woman would be secluded from all public activity. One of the most vocal and widely read proponents of woman's veiling and seclusion is Pakistani Maulana Abul A'la Maududi.[43]

Concerned with the state of his society and the encroachment of Western values, in 1939 he published the immensely popular *Purdah and the Status of Woman in Islam*.[44] Maududi had very definite attitudes regarding woman's role in society, believing that the family was the cornerstone of a just Islamic community. In order to prevent the moral decay as seen in the West and to rejuvenate the family, women needed to be secluded, or at the very least completely veiled. The purpose was to ensure the control of man's destructive animal nature.[45] In the wholesome atmosphere of true Islam, where the rules as set down in the Koran are followed, men and women:

> ...can perform their social functions to the best of their ability, uninterrupted by the lusts of the flesh, in which family system, the corner-stone of civilisation, can be firmly established, in which lineage can remain pure and uncorrupted, in which the family life can be a source of peace and comfort for man, a cradle of educational training for his offspring and an association for co-operative action for all members of the family.[46]

For Maududi, the family is the basis of the community, therefore the focal point of Islam. The foremost goal of a true Islamic society, the community, is to prevent the sexual urge from dominating people's lives as it does in the West. It is necessary to moderate and regulate it within "a system" to prevent abnormal and sensuous tendencies.

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[43] Adams, Charles J. "Mawdudi and the Islamic State," *Voices of Resurgent Islam*. John L. Esposito. ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 99.

[44] Maududi, Maulana Abul A'la. *Purdah and the Status of Woman in Islam*, al-Ashari, trans., (Lahore: Islamic Publications Limited, 1972).

[45] *Ibid.*, p. 83.

[46] *Ibid.*

To facilitate the smooth functioning of the system, men and women each have specific roles to fulfil, which reflect their innate natures.

According to Maududi in an ideal Muslim society in which modesty has been fully inculcated, a woman would not leave her home.[47] The only education she would receive is that which would make her a better wife and mother.[48] A man's moral duty is to protect the honour of the females within his home and guard himself against any sexual indiscretions. Any lapse in his duty or infraction on the woman's part reflects upon his honour. Following from this, any attempt on the woman's part to move into the public sphere would be contrary to God's divine rule.

Man's nature is aggressive, therefore if something appeals, he desires it. To combat this potentially disruptive behaviour, the solution is to take away or shroud the stimulus, therefore much of the book details the commandments of purdah—clothing to be worn, when it is proper to look, help, or touch a woman, and the rare times when she may be permitted to leave seclusion. Maududi's view of woman's place in society puts her unquestioningly within the home. If circumstances dictate that it is absolutely necessary to leave the home she is to be completely veiled.

Despite the controversy surrounding women's veiling and seclusion, nowhere is veiling mentioned explicitly in the Koran as a practice to be adopted by all women. The Koran plainly states that Muhammad's wives were required to be veiled, but as the verse says, they were not like other women. Most Muslims have interpreted these "modesty" verses as legislation that all women from puberty on (marriageable age)

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[47] *Ibid.*, p.146.
[48] *Ibid.*, p. 152.

should be veiled. This has been implemented over time and geography to varying degrees, from complete seclusion and/or veiling with no skin showing, to merely wearing a headscarf. In Afghanistan, the Taliban have made the strictest form of Islamic dress, the *burqa*, mandatory for women, based on this concept of controlling man's urges and purifying society.

Polygamy

The verses surrounding polygamy have generated a great deal of controversial debate, hugely affecting the institution of marriage:

> Give unto the orphans of their wealth. Exchange not the good for the bad (in your own management thereof) nor absorb their wealth into your own wealth. Lo! That would be a great sin. . . And if ye fear ye will not deal fairly by the orphans, marry of the women, who seem good to you, two, or three, or four; and if ye fear that ye cannot do justice (to so many) then one (only) or (the captives) that your right hand possesses. Thus it is more likely that ye will not do injustice.(4:2-3)

What does this mean? Can a man marry only one woman or can he marry four? And what does this have to do with orphans?

It was not long after Muhammad's marriage to A'isha and his marriage to Hafsa that the verse regarding polygamy was revealed. Simultaneously the Battle of Uhud (625 C.E.) left many women widowed and children orphaned.[49] In keeping with the Koran's concern for justice, the issue of orphans and widowed refugees needed to be addressed. To support the believing women and facilitate the conversion of the enemy, men of sufficient means were encourage to take more than one wife. But W. M. Watt suggests that it was not just a problem of widows:

> ...the crux of the problem of excess women was not the widows but unmarried girls, who would have come under the guardianship of uncles, cousins, and other kinsmen. With some hints from other sources, we can

[49] Ahmed. (1986), p. 680.

> imagine the treatment women and girls might receive from selfish and unsympathetic guardians; they would have been kept unmarried so that the guardian could have unrestricted control of their property, and it would have been difficult for them to obtain legal redress against their legal protectors.[50]

The revelation which explicitly mentioned those women who were forbidden (4:22-24) put many of the young girls outside the realm of the ward, so that he himself could not marry her. Further, the treatment and care of orphans and their property was thoroughly addressed in other places in the Koran (2:177, 220),(4:2, 3, 6, 127) in an attempt to deal fairly and justly with these people.

The second part of passage 4:3 includes the moral injunction regarding justice to all wives. This issue of justice is repeated in 4:129, "ye will not be able to deal equally between (your) wives, however much ye wish (to do so)..." The claim is that polygamy is forbidden as it is impossible to treat all wives equally.

Hadith literature supports the idea of polygamy with as exemplified by chapters entitled: "To draw lots among wives", "The wife giving up her turn to another wife", "Sexual relations with all wives in one day", and "Loving some wives more than others."[51] These chapters have resulted in many different interpretations. Historically, following conservative/ fundamentalist tendencies, this aspect of polygamy has been viewed as being left to the man's discretion, while the permission clause holds legal power, thereby allowing a man to marry four women and have as many concubines as "your right hand possesses"(4:3).[52]

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[50] Watt, W. Montgomery. *Muhammad at Medina*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), p. 280.
[51] Sahih al-Bukhari. Vol. 7, Book LXII, Chps. 98, 99, 104, 106.
[52] Rahman., pp. 47-48.

One of the most outspoken opponents of polygamy was Egyptian scholar and jurist Muhammad Abduh. He believed that the true Islamic system of law and government of the age of the Founding Fathers, if properly understood, was based on natural principles. The rigid formalism commonly associated with traditional dogmas was considered by Abduh to be the result of ignorance and error.[53]

One area in which Abduh was quite outspoken was the issue of polygamy. He claimed that it encouraged male tyranny and lasciviousness, female exploitation and oppression. Polygamy may have been a useful practice in the past for early believers, but it became corrupt, devoid of justice and humanity and was no longer beneficial to the community's welfare.[54] Abduh gave priority to the Koranic injunction that man could not do justice to more than one wife and therefore should not marry more than one woman. The clause permitting polygamy was a reluctant concession made to the early community so that it could cope with the huge influx of orphans and widows.[55] However, Abduh believed that the true intent of the Koran—the ideal—was monogamy.[56] The demand for the abolishment of polygamy inspired many of Abduh's most impassioned and daring *fatwas* (official religious opinions). He felt that the present regulations of Islam regarding issues like polygamy, divorce, slavery, etc., did not belong to the essentials of Islam, but were subject to modifications according to the circumstances.[57]

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[53] Kerr, Malcolm. *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal Theories of Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashid Rida.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), pp. 105-106.

[54] Adams, Charles C. *Islam and Modernism in Egypt: A Study of the Modern Reform Movement Inaugurated by Muhammad 'Abduh.* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1933), p. 230.

[55] *Ibid.*

[56] Esposito. (1982), p. 51.

[57] Adams. (1933), p. 230.

Fazlur Rahman reflects this belief in his book *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (1980). He claims that:

> The truth seems to be that the permission for polygamy was at a legal plane while the sanctions put on it were in the nature of a moral ideal towards which the society was expected to move. . .[58]

Rahman views the verses permitting polygamy as concessions to a practice that would have been impossible to wipe out immediately, as it had been in use for centuries. But the goal was for man (in the generic sense) to strive towards the time when polygamy was no longer a necessary evil.[59] Traditionalist elements of society have vehemently opposed Abduh's position on polygamy. The Prophet's own polygamous household is often used as an argument for the institution. Maududi believes that the verse regarding polygamy is clear and that the Koran has permitted man to enjoy more than one wife. He claims that it is only because of Western influence that Muslims are questioning this honourable institution.[60]

Other conservative arguments include the belief that polygamy is the more noble and compassionate system because it protects the older, sick, or barren wife from divorce, while ensuring children for the man who may take a young and healthy second wife. Another argument is that it is the fairest solution to the abundance of women in times of war, when soldiers are killed and there are not enough men to ensure marriage and motherhood opportunities for all females. Third, polygamy is a much more virtuous option than prostitution or adultery as is seen in the West.[61]

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[58] Rahman, p. 48.
[59] *Ibid.*
[60] Maududi, p. 20.
[61] Stowasser. (1994), 122.

The reality of polygamy is that most do not view the concessions as pertinent only to a certain time in history. As one author points out, there is no Muslim "Vatican" to issue binding directives either in support of or against polygamy. Individual worship, community traditions, and social and economic pressure appear to be more influential in guiding a person's behaviour.[62] Today, polygamy remains a legal option in many countries, as Islamic law has permitted it. Yet throughout the twentieth century, many Muslim reformers have attempted to have these laws modified, based on their interpretation that monogamy is the Koranic ideal. In 1953, Syria was the first country to restrict polygamy. This was soon followed by the complete prohibition of polygamy in Tunisia in 1957.[63]

Divorce

While verses on polygamy and seclusion tend to be quite ambiguous, both the Koran and hadith are fairly straightforward regarding divorce. Marriage is undoubtedly portrayed as the ideal state for men and women. But both scriptures acknowledge that divorce is a lawful option if the marriage is intolerable. The verses which outline the procedures for divorce invariably include several lines encouraging the man to take his wife back and reconcile even if they have divorced two and three times:

> Those who forswear their wives must wait four months; then, if they change their mind, lo! Allah is Forgiving(2:226). . . And if he hath divorced her (the third time), then she is not lawful unto him thereafter until she hath wedded another husband. Then if he (the other husband) divorce her it is not sin for both of them that they come together again if they consider that they are able to observe the limits of Allah.(2:230)

Based on Islamic law, after three declarations of divorce by the husband, it is considered final, and reconciliation is impossible. A man can only remarry his ex-wife if she marries

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[62] Qureshi, p. 45.
[63] Esposito. (1982), p.125.

someone else then somehow becomes divorced again or is widowed.[64] The impetus for such a requirement was to diminish the pre-Islamic practice of perpetually divorcing a woman, pretending to take her back, and divorcing her again. The purpose of such a practice was to either convince her to give back her dower for her freedom or prevent her from re-marrying and seeking the protection of another husband.[65]

Despite this, men appear to have the upper hand when it comes to divorce. According to tradition, the male can divorce the female at will with no outstanding reason, while the female has very little power to initiate divorce. This appears to be tempered by lines exhorting a man to treat his wife kindly (i.e. 2: 229, 231, 232). Verse 20 of Sura 4 is indicative of how simple it is for a man to divorce his wife:

> And if ye wish to exchange one wife for another and ye have given unto one of them a sum of money (however great), take nothing from it. Would ye take it by way of calumny and open wrong? (4:20)

Fatima Mernissi views these two words "wish" and "exchange" as highly indicative of the nature of the Muslim institution of verbal repudiation. She claims that this is the foundation of the unconditional right of the male to break the marriage bond without any justification and without having his actions reviewed by a court or a judge.[66] The one mitigating factor to discourage a man from divorce is the injunction which states he may not take away any of the gifts which he has given her, including her dower (2:229).

A wife was given the ability to dissolve the marriage: "If a woman feareth ill-treatment from her husband or desertion, it is no sin for them twain..."(4:128) This verse

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[64] *Ibid.*, p. 38.
[65] *Ibid.*, p. 39.
[66] Mernissi, Fatima. *Beyond theVeil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society.* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 49.

has been interpreted in different ways. Islamic law takes different positions regarding the female right to divorce, though all schools of Islamic law agree that the male may terminate divorce unilaterally and extrajudicially. Yet the Maliki school of law gives a woman the right to obtain a divorce not only on the grounds of sexual impotence as in the Hanafi school of law, but also on the basis of desertion, failure to provide for her, cruelty, as the verse above indicates, and if her husband is afflicted with a sickness which could affect her adversely.[67]

Despite the Maliki interpretation, this verse has generally been interpreted to mean that a woman should be given very little power to separate herself from her husband, and that he should have control of the marriage if tensions arise. In many cases of divorce, she must return her dower, and any gifts her husband may have given her. Essentially, she must purchase her freedom.[68] The Koran does mention the fact that a woman could ransom herself:

> And if is not lawful for you that ye take from women aught of that which ye have given them; except (in the case) when both fear that they may not be able to keep within the limits (imposed by) Allah. And if ye fear that they may not be able to keep the limits of Allah, in that case it is no sin for either of them if the woman ransom herself.(2:229)

Was it intended that a woman should pay her husband to divorce her? If he was abusive and she "feareth ill treatment" (4:128) was she forced to pay him then as well? The limitations on a woman's ability to divorce her husband contrasted with divorce practices in certain pre-Islamic communities. One historian claimed that before Islam, one manner of divorce for women was that if they lived in a tent, they turned it around so that the

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[67] Ahmed. (1992), p. 91.
[68] Mernissi. (1987), p. 63.

entrance faced the other direction. When a "husband" saw this he knew that she had divorced him.[69]

The verses regulating divorce also demand that a woman wait a certain period of time if she is to be divorced:

> Women who are divorced shall wait, keeping themselves apart, three (monthly) courses. And it is not lawful for them that they should conceal that which Allah hath created in their wombs if they are believers in Allah and the last day. And their husbands would do better to take them back in that case if they desire a reconciliation (2:229).

The two purposes for the observation of the "iddah" period are to provide time for reconciliation and to guarantee paternity, as it was assumed that a child born in wedlock belongs to the husband even if he is not the biological father.[70] Following from this, a woman who is pregnant is forbidden to remarry until she gives birth (65:4). This is to guarantee the father an heir and secondly to prevent a man from having to support a child who is not his. A man is also obligated to support his wife for the designated iddah period, usually about four months. If she is pregnant, he is required to support her as long as she nurses the child, to a maximum of two years.[71] But after that, she is on her own if they divorce (65:6).

Children were very important to the first community, as they were the building blocks of society. They were also often victims of much abuse (i.e., the verse condemning infanticide), which explains the many verses dedicated to their care. While women are responsible for their care the Koran has essentially put the children into the custody of their father, who in theory, can better support them financially. This is reflected in Islamic law which states that a divorced mother has custody of her children

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[69] Ahmed. (1986), p. 669.
[70] Mernissi. (1987), p. 63.
[71] Esposito. (1982), p.36.

only until the male child is seven and the female child is nine (puberty), at which time they are given back to their father. During this time in their mother's custody, the father is still their natural guardian and maintainer.[72] In a society where a woman's primary value is placed on her as a mother or wife, these laws would have dire consequences on her status. Furthermore, if she should choose to remarry, while the children are still young, she loses custody of her children to their father.[73]

Taking into consideration all of the verses regarding marriage, polygamy, and divorce, an unmarried independent woman was and still is strongly discouraged from remaining that way. All sexual activity is strictly regulated within the institution of marriage and paternity needs to be guaranteed. Single women (including orphans) are seen by the Koran as not only needing protection, but also society needing protection from them. The institution of marriage as delineated in the Koran was intended to maintain a just social order, whereby there would be one man and one or more women. This was in direct contrast to the varieties of unions men and women engaged in prior to Islam.[74] Unfortunately for the woman, this placed her securely under the guardianship of her husband. Several legal controls were put in place to prevent men from abusing their power, although in most cases the effectiveness of these controls was lessened by further Koranic concessions to the male dominated community.

Dower

Upon marriage it is a woman's right to receive a dower (mahr). This bridal money is part of her property and her husband can in no way force her to spend it:

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[72] *Ibid.*, p.37.
[73] *Ibid.*
[74] Ahmed. (1986), p. 668.

> And give unto women (whom ye marry) free gift of their marriage portions; but if they of their own accord remit unto you a part thereof, then ye are welcome to absorb it into your wealth(4:4).

Brides on the other hand were not obligated to give their husbands gifts. In the case of divorce initiated by her husband, she would retain this dower (4:20). It is important to keep in mind, though, the verse regarding divorce which states that a woman can ransom herself from an unhappy marriage (2:229). If all a woman possesses is her marriage dower, to attain her freedom she would likely have to return it to her husband. Thus, a woman may have to forgo financial independence in order to receive a divorce.

Inheritance

A second means to financial security is an inheritance. Inheritance was considered to be of such great importance, that the Koran dealt with it in considerable detail. It charged men with leaving their female relatives (i.e., daughters, wives, sisters etc) some sort of inheritance:

> Unto the men (of a family) belongeth a share of that which parents and near kindred leave, and unto the women a share of that which parents and near kindred leave, whether it be little or much- a legal share(4:7)...to the male the equivalent of the portion of two females, and if there be women more than two, then theirs is two-thirds the inheritance...(4:11)

These rulings were not entirely welcome in agricultural Medina, where inheritance usually entailed the fragmentation of the family land. This was especially the case as women usually left their own families to join their husbands, taking their inheritance with them. Children of a man's concubine also were considered legal heirs, whether they were male or female.[75] This aspect would have obviously discouraged a man from impregnating his concubines or taking more than one wife if he was poor.

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[75] Ahmed. (1992), p. 92.

Several different interpretations have been made of this verse. Amina Wadud-Muhsin claims that a female receiving one-half of what a male receives is just one of several proportional arrangements possible. Consideration of parents, siblings, distant relatives, as well as offspring is discussed in a variety of different combinations to indicate that the proportion for the female of one-half the male is not the sole mode of property division.[76]

Sayyid Qutb would have strongly disagreed with this position. He justified a woman receiving half of what a man received because a man had more of a financial burden than a woman, having to provide for the entire family, while any money or property a woman had was her own. For Qutb, this appeared to be additional evidence that a woman's only roles in life were as a wife and mother. A man needed the larger inheritance, whereas the woman, who made no financial contribution to the family did not.[77] A further argument states that as the woman receives a dower, the inheritance shares really entail true equality.[78]

Fazlur Rahman takes the position that the question of female inheritance needs to be studied further in light of today's changed social and economic realities.[79] Essentially, he is referring to the fact that a woman's role is moving beyond the bounds of wife and mother. A single income for a family is becoming insufficient and women are now contributing to the financial security of the family by taking jobs outside the home. Thus, the argument that a woman has no need for an equal inheritance as she does not contribute to the family finances, no longer has any merit.

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[76] Wadud-Muhsin., p. 87.
[77] Qutb, p. 49.
[78] Rahman, p. 51.
[79] *Ibid.*

The Koranic injunctions giving a woman the right to inherit and control property and income put some limits on male control within marriage (or divorce). Unfortunately, one specific revelation effectively curtailed a woman's ability to become financially independent:

> ...give not unto the foolish (what is in) your (keeping of their) wealth which Allah hath given you to maintain; but feed and clothe them from it, and speak kindly unto them (4:5).

The placement of this verse is interesting. It is found between the revelations regarding dowry and the fortune of orphans. While these three verses clearly encourage man to deal fairly, the above verse allows him to retain control of his wife (or female charges) and her property if she is declared unfit to administer her own wealth. There is no indication as to who decides the state of mind of the person in question. It is assumed to be a man's right to decide, not an impartial third party. This verse gives a man the option to disregard the injunctions permitting women economic freedom, thereby eliminating any hope of financial independence.

Adultery and Slander

Adultery and fornication were extremely serious crimes in a community that placed the cohesion of the family as a high priority. The large number of revelations regarding familial relations attests to this fact. In the Koran adultery is punished in a variety of ways:

> As for those of your women who are guilty of lewdness, call to witness four of you against them. And if they testify (to the truth of the allegation) then confine them to the houses until death take them or (until) Allah appoint for them a way [through new legislation](4:15).

New legislation was later revealed addressing both men and women this time and the punishment was changed:

> The adulterer and the adulteress, scourge ye each one of them (with) a hundred stripes. And let not pity for the twain withhold you from obedience to Allah. . . The adulterer shall not marry save an adulteress or an idolatress and the adulteress none shall marry save an adulterer or an idolater. All that is forbidden unto believers.(24:2-3)

In contrast to the Koran, hadith literature exacts a harsher punishment, death by stoning. Several chapters detail stories of men and women who committed adultery, all of whom were stoned to death. Do these chapters take precedence over the Koranic verses which deem flogging a just punishment? What of the verses in the Koran that permit an adulterer or adulteress to remarry? Capital punishment is obviously not an option here, if one gives priority to the Koran.

A woman was supposed to receive protection from flagrant slander based on a revelation Muhammad received regarding his wife 'A'isha. One day, while out on campaign against a pagan tribe, 'A'isha was left behind when the army packed up and left the camp. She was later found and returned to Muhammad by a young soldier who happened to come across her at the abandoned campsite. On her return, 'A'isha was accused by members of the community of having committing adultery.[80] Muhammad received her exoneration in the revelations found in Sura 24:

> And those who accuse honourable women but bring not four witnesses, scourge them (with) eighty stripes and never (afterward) accept their testimony – They indeed are evil-doers(24:4). . . Lo! They who spread the slander are a gang among you(24:11). . . Why did they not produce four witnesses? Since they produce not four witnesses, they verily are liars in the sight of Allah(24:13).

The purpose of this was not only to acquit 'A'isha of her guilt, but also to protect women from slander regarding their fidelity.

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[80] Pickthall., p. 357.

Four witnesses to prove the guilt of adultery seems somewhat reasonable. Further, if an accuser cannot produce four witnesses, then he stands accused of false accusation for which the Koran has deemed as punishment eighty "stripes." (24:4) Yet in verse six of the same Sura, it states that if a man is not able to procure four witnesses then, ". . . let the testimony of one of them be four testimonies, (swearing) by Allah that he is of whose who speak the truth(24:6)". The woman can ". . .avert the punishment from her if she bear witness before Allah four times that the thing he saith is indeed false." (24:8) In the Koran then, a denial by the woman should absolve her of any guilt.

Conclusion

The primary goal of Islam was to introduce justice and security into a world where the weak are abused and oppressed. The majority of these people would have been women, young and old and the safest place for them at this time in history would have been under the guardianship of men—husbands, fathers, brothers, uncles etc. In providing this security for women, Islam wiped out the few non-patriarchal practices from pre-Islamic times, in favour of creating a family consisting of one man and one or more women. This family, based on a system of ethics outlined in the Koran was the foundation of the new community of believers. Within the family, the woman's obligations were to look after her husband's property, be faithful and obedient, be a willing sexual partner and look after his children. In return for this the husband's responsibility was to provide food, shelter and clothing and treat his wife kindly. She had a separate economic personality, whereby she was to receive a dower and inheritance that she could do with what she pleased. A woman also had rights and roles outside of the family: the right to take the oath of allegiance, a powerful indication of her individuality;

give evidence, although much debate surrounds this injunction; participate in warfare, supported by a great deal of hadith literature; and finally, based on the story of Bilqis, take part in politics at every level. On a spiritual and moral plane, a woman had an individual relationship with God, equal to that of the man and her rewards in heaven for good works on earth were the same as man's. Within the Koran, on a spiritual and moral plane, woman and man were equal. But based on the economic and social realities of the time, men had a functional superiority over women as they were ultimately responsible for the material welfare of the family unit.

Islamic exegesis, both past and present, has interpreted verses in the Koran and chapters in the hadith regarding woman's position and moulded them to fit what can be characterised as traditionalist (or conservative), fundamentalist and modernist tendencies. Traditionalists view Islam as a balanced system of faith and action based on the Koran, hadith and community consensus. Anything associated with the West is viewed as a threat to traditionalists, as it is considered cultural contamination. Therefore the preservation of traditional structures, including cultural practices which have no true basis in Islam, are crucial to the sanctity of the community. Women are looked upon as the bearers and transmitters of culture and therefore need to be guarded closely. Generally, traditionalists support the belief that women are physically and mentally inferior to men and therefore have no business in public life.

Fundamentalists or Islamists view themselves as soldiers fighting for the Islamic way of life. They permit no modification to the models set down in the Koran and hadith and vehemently criticise any regime that does not follow Islamic law. They attempt to translate the Koran directly into thought and action, in the process bypassing the centuries old domination of the ulama (traditional religious authorities). Islamism has

become a direct threat to many regimes, as they have great appeal for the masses. The result of this has been violent suppression in many countries. Women play a large role within the fundamentalist movements, as her conduct, dress and domesticity are all part of her fight for the Islamic way of life. The movement has proven to be attractive to women as they are promised their God-given rights (as outlined in the sharia) which in the past have been denied to them.

Modernists recognise untouched and undefiled faith as exemplified by the Prophet and the first community, as the only legitimate sources of religion. This is distinguished from the later communities, which corrupted the message of Islam, as it absorbed cultures from outside of Arabia. Ijtihad, the independent interpretation of Islamic scripture and exegesis is crucial as it permits the modernist to retrieve the value system as it was lived out in sacred origins. This implies that a text or precedent can be generalised as a principle and that the principle can be formulated as a new rule. The importance of this for women's rights lays in the fact that the principles of equality found in the Koran are equally applicable to all people, men and women, and should be reflected law. The following chapter will examine how these different interpretations have interacted with each other and the state over the last century in Egypt resulting in several debates on women's rights. It will also show how women themselves were no longer merely the subject of such debates, instead they actively participated in defining the discourses.

Chapter 3: The Women's Movement in Egyptian History

Introduction

Following from the previous chapter, three different aspects of a woman's existence are formulated in the Koran and expanded upon in the hadith: her relationship with God; her rights and obligations in society beyond the family; and her rights and obligations within the family. Using the same foundational basis, several different interpretations emerge that illustrate the lack of consensus within the Muslim community on what a woman's place is in Islam and therefore in society. Islamists view the Koran as giving woman full spiritual equality with man, yet confine her to the domestic sphere under the guardianship of a man. Islamists also believe the verses governing the behaviour of women (and men) should be followed unaltered regardless of a 1300 year time lapse. The Islamists' goal is the creation of an Islamic state governed by the sharia (Islamic Law). Liberal interpreters of woman's rights and status take a different view, believing that the verses proclaiming a woman's absolute equality with man are of primary importance for society.[1] These moral verses regarding the equality of man and woman should be extended into all areas of life: social, political, economic, and religious. The more explicit injunctions in the Koran (e.g. verses regulating divorce that give man greater power) were directed at the specific society in which Muhammad lived and were intended to evolve over time.

This chapter will examine how theoretical interpretations of scripture and hadith take shape within society and how they interact with each other and with the state. Islam cannot be considered a monolithic religion; regional traditions and cultures have

[1] For example please see verses 3:195, 4:124, and 33:35.

greatly influenced how Islam is lived and practiced. For specificity, this study will focus on one particular society, Egypt.

Egypt has a long history of divergent movements, including a strong tradition of female activism. In the words of Fouad Ajami:

> . . . Egypt is where Arab history comes into focus. The country epitomizes the possibilities and limits of Arab history. From the last two centuries, from Muhammad Ali to Anwar el-Sadat, Egyptians have been experimenting with statehood, with national manufacturing, with sorting out their ambiguous and difficult relationship with the West, with bourgeois ideas, with state capitalism (and its dismantlement), with large-scale wars (and their conclusion). If theirs has not been a particularly successful quest, it has been a historically gripping drama, complete with heroes, villains, tragedies, and here and there, some solid achievements.[2]

Egypt is the ideal country in which to locate this study of feminist and Islamist discourses on women. The history is rich in multi-faceted debates on women's status. The role women play in these debates has mystified scholars for decades, and only now is research being carried out that could help explain the diverse nature of women's activism. This chapter has several purposes: to provide the historical foundation for discourses on women which dominate contemporary times; to distinguish between men and women's feminism; to show that women's feminism has indigenous roots; to outline the background of the Islamist movement, which currently claims large numbers of women as supporters—a fact which perplexes most observers; and finally to delineate the impact of different political regimes on these discourses.

Early Feminism

Until recently, research on the feminist movement in Egypt has been quite sparse. Most analyses begin with Qasim Amin's writings, as he is often considered

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[2] Ajami, Fouad. *The Arab Predicament: Arab Political Thought and Practice Since 1967.* (Cambridge: Cambridge: University Press, 1993), p. 17.

"father of Egyptian feminism", and follow through with the claim that "the most prominent advocates have been men who took up the cause of women."[3] Coinciding with that is the belief that feminism in Egypt is a foreign idea imported with imperialism, "it was an openness to Western thought, and among those who set themselves to explore the Western heritage, that reformist and feminist notions were born."[4]

One author has questioned these analyses and looked to original sources for more information. Margot Badran, in groundbreaking work, has distinguished between women's feminism in the mid-nineteenth century, the true and indigenous origins of Egyptian feminism, and men's feminism begun later by Qasim Amin.[5] The implications for this are enormous, as she clearly establishes that Egyptian feminism has indigenous roots. To claim that colonialists introduced feminism and that it was encouraged mostly by men discredits the intellectual endeavors made by the first feminists in Egypt. The following outlines these early beginnings of women's feminism.

Egypt was in the early stages of modern state formation and integration into the capitalist system of the West when feminism first emerged among the middle and upper classes of society. Cities were growing at incredible rates with Cairo and Alexandria becoming the two largest in the Arab world.[6] Migration from rural areas to the city was commonplace and an intermingling of classes and customs could not be

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[3] Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck., "Islam, Women and Revolution in Twentieth Century Arab Thought," *Women, Religion and Social Change*. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Ellison Banks Findly, eds. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), p. 296.

[4] Ahmed, Leila., "Feminism and Feminist Movements in the Middle East, A Preliminary Exploration: Turkey, Egypt, Algeria, People's Democratic Republic of Yemen," *Women and Islam*. Azizah al-Hibri, ed. (Ontario: Pergamon Press, 1982), p.159. See also Philipp, Thomas. "Feminism and Nationalist Politics in Egypt," *Women in the Muslim World*. Lois Beck and Nikkie Keddie eds. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978) pp. 277-294

[5] This distinction between women's feminism and men's feminism was first articulated by Margot Badran in : "Dual Liberation: Feminism and Nationalism in Egypt, 1870s-1925," *Feminist Issues*, Spring 1988, 15-34.

[6] Hourani, Albert. *A History of the Arab Peoples*. (New York: Warner Books, 1992), p. 292.

prevented. During the last third of the nineteenth century, Cairo was becoming home to absentee landowners, and a new professional class of lawyers, doctors, and engineers.[7]

This upheaval in Egypt modified to some degree many social structures and traditions, including women's seclusion. A result of this cautious "opening up" of society was that, in the theoretical sense, women's feminism began to form. This is distinct from men's feminism, which began with Amin and the debate on modernization, which will be addressed at a later point.

For the most part, Egyptian women first began to express their feminist conscious within the harem, a world cut off from men. The first women to express this new awareness about gender were born in the middle of the nineteenth century. They published books of poetry and prose, biographical dictionaries of famous women, and articles and essays in the press as early as the 1870s and 1880s.[8] The three women briefly examined below exemplify the new consciousness of this period and were considered by many of the later feminists (e.g. Huda Sharawi) to be the forerunners to Egyptian feminism.[9]

Warda al-Yaziji was born and educated in Lebanon. At the age of twenty-eight she married, yet continued to write poetry, teach school, and raise five children—a remarkable feat in any age. A collection of her work was published in 1867 in Lebanon and again in 1914 in Egypt. Upon the death of her husband in 1899, al-Yazji moved to

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[7] Badran, Margot. "The Origins of Feminism," *Current Issues in Women's History*. Arina Angerman et al. (eds.) (London: Routledge, 1989), p.158.

[8] Badran, Margot. *Feminists, Islam and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt*. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), p.14.

[9] Badran. (1989), p. 160.

Egypt where she continued to write poetry and make frequent contributions to Arabic magazines discussing the status of women.[10]

Zaynab Fawwaz was also born in Lebanon but emigrated to Egypt when she was ten years old. She published numerous articles in magazines and a compendium of biographies of famous Arab and European women, entitled *Pearls Scattered Throughout the Women's Quarters*.[11] This was a significant undertaking, as naming women and according them a place in society was a revolutionary idea at the time.[12] One of Fawwaz's most radical writings, published in 1891, was entitled *Fair and Equal Treatment*. It urges the recognition of women's abilities, equal treatment, and the rejection of essentialism:

> For woman was not created in order to remain within the household sphere, never to emerge. Woman was not created to become involved in work outside the home *only* when it is directly necessary for household management, childrearing, cooking, kneading bread, and other occupations of the same sort. . . No, upon my life! Rather, the practices to which women are accustomed permit them to acquire and work in all arts and skills. As for household management and childrearing, these are natural and instinctive aptitudes in women, needing no lesson or education or code of practice or established guidelines.[13]

Fawwaz advocated education to feed the hungry mind of a woman and broaden her horizons, not to make her into a better mother or wife. She believed that women had been mothers and wives for so long that training was not needed. Her views contrasted directly with those of Qasim Amin and others like him who advocated education for the reason of making her a better mother and wife. What Fawwaz advocated was revolutionary for her time and went well beyond the demands of the male feminists.

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[10] Badran Margot and Cooke, Miriam. *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing*. (London: Virago Press Limited, 1990), p. 21.

[11] *Ibid.*, p.220.

[12] Badran. (1995), p.14.

[13] Fawwaz, Zainab., "Fair and Equal Treatment," *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing*. Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke, trans. and eds., (London: Virago Press Limited, 1990), p. 223.

Aisha Ismat al-Taimuriyya focused her writings on the desperate need for women's education and her own unhappiness with domestic seclusion. One of these pieces was published in 1887:

> What hindered me from realising this hope [of learning] was the tentlike screen of an all-enveloping wrap. And the lock on the private quarters of femaleness hid and secluded me from the radiance of those celestial moons. The ally of burdens and griefs kept me in the prison of ignorance. Whoever may censure me for lapses in that which I write must see this seclusion is the greatest of excuses.[14]

One author states that it was al-Taimuriyya who was first among both men and women to advocate equality between the sexes.[15] Other writers (all women) considered her to be the founding mother of feminist expression.[16] These three women were the first Egyptians to articulate what can be termed a feminist consciousness. Undoubtedly, there were other women who felt the same but were unable to express it in written form, or find a publisher for their writings.

This feminist consciousness continued to evolve throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries as women increasingly participated in other social activities. Several middle class women founded magazines in the 1890's, creating a forum in which women could voice their opinions to a larger audience on issues such as marriage, divorce, veiling and seclusion, education, and work.[17] While the women who started the first magazines were not Muslim, Muslim women including those listed above, did have works published in them. It was also common for women to be published in men's

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[14] Al-Taimuriyya, Aisha Ismat. "Introduction to the Results of Circumstances in Words and Deeds," *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing*. Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke, trans. and eds.

[15] Badran and Cooke, p.125.

[16] Badran. (1995), p.14.

[17] Baron, Beth., *The Women's Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society and the Press*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p.3.

magazines.[18] Holding and participating in "salons" was another activity that women used to disseminate ideas. In the tradition of the French salon, people gathered to discuss ideas and make plans for further activities. Therefore, not only did the salon function as forum for discussion, at the same time it provided women with an opportunity to broaden their networks.[19]

The feminism examined thus far has been "woman-centered," meaning that it started essentially among women who were unhappy with their own lives and had a desire to reach out and express their feelings of frustration. The first activities, which could be construed as political, involved writing and publishing and then gathering to discuss their ideas. All of these activities set the stage for activist feminism that would emerge more fully as the new century progressed.

So far, the term 'feminism' has been employed to describe an era when the word itself was not actually in use. Women did not use it to describe themselves until 1923 when the Egyptian Feminist Union was formed. For analytical purposes, it is helpful to use the term "feminism", but a clarification is needed regarding its actual meaning within the Egyptian context. The use of the word in this analysis reflects the research carried out by Margot Badran in which she defines the parameters of feminism as:

> . . . one or more of the following: an awareness by women that as women they are systematically placed in a disadvantaged position; some forms of rejection of enforced behaviors and thought; and attempts to interpret their own experiences and then to improve their position or lives of women. . . to a more complex analysis of oppression, the liberation of women and various forms of activism.[20]

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[18] Badran and Cooke, p.21.
[19] Badran. (1989), p.162.
[20] Badran and Cooke., "Introduction," p. xviii. and Badran. (1989), p. 156.

The terms "feminist consciousness" or "feminist awareness" are recent ideas, yet they reflect the events of the late nineteenth century when women began to recognize and express their unhappiness with their situation. These definitions preclude the appropriation of the term "feminism" and its derivatives from being utilized exclusively by Western feminists, thus expanding the range of meaning. Understanding these definitions is crucial to comprehending movements in Egypt where women play active parts.

The Origins of Men's Feminism

As stated previously, men's feminism did exist, distinct from women's feminism, and was of different origins. It began with the father of Islamic modernism, Egyptian scholar and jurist Muhammad Abduh. Egypt was undergoing a radical cultural change. Western ideologies, science, and technology were making their way into Egyptian society at a rapid pace. Abduh believed that traditional interpretations of Islam could not contend with these changes in society and that Islam was in desperate need of revival. Abduh believed Muhammad had been sent to found a virtuous society, and that there were laws that needed to be followed to bring about this society. But society itself changes, and rulers and citizens are faced with problems not addressed in the prophetic message. The question Abduh faced was how to reconcile a changing society with Islam. The European laws that Muhammad Ali and his successors had implemented were unsuited to Egyptian/Islamic culture. Laws must have some relation with the standards and circumstances of the country to which they are applied. European laws were

inappropriate for Egypt, as most Egyptians did not understand them and therefore disobeyed them.[21]

Abduh took several steps to reconcile his evolving society with its deeply rooted Islamic culture. He determined that in the pursuit of religious and all other forms of knowledge, one must lead with reason. He first distinguished what was essential and unchanging in religion from what was inessential and could be changed without any damage. Using the Koran and hadith as his starting point, he argued that all of the general principles of individual morality and social organization and all of the commandments to perform certain acts (i.e. worship) were universal truths. In matters where the Koran was unclear, or the hadith was in doubt, reason must be the interpreter and individual ijtihad (independent inquiry) becomes crucial. Only those who possess the necessary knowledge and power can exercise ijtihad. 'Ijma, or community consensus, cannot be considered infallible and cannot close the door of ijtihad.[22] For Abduh, reason was the basis of the ideal Muslim society.[23]

Abduh's reasoning had major repercussions for the rights and roles of women. He discussed many issues surrounding the status of women, calling for a transformation of the social conditions and customs that affected the lives of women.[24] Abduh and his followers believed in women's full human dignity. Men and women, with respect to their essential nature, their inherent rights, and their relationship to God, were all on an equal plane. There was no difference between men and women in regard to humanity and no superiority of one over the other in works. Abduh also believed in the

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[21] Hourani, Albert. *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 136-137.

[22] *Ibid.*, p.147.

[23] *Ibid.*,p. 148

[24] Adams. (1933), p. 230.

absolute necessity for the training and education of girls, no less than that of boys. He felt that the present regulations of Islam regarding issues like polygamy, divorce, and slavery, etc., did not belong to the essentials of Islam, but were subject to modifications according to the circumstances.[25]

Abduh's theology influenced several movements in Egypt, including the feminist movement, which would use his ideas as support for their feminist demands. None of their propositions were made outside of the Islamic framework. Not only did Abduh's ideas pave the way for proposals made by the feminists, but also for the arguments made by Qasim Amin.

When discussing the origins of feminism, Qasim Amin's name is invariably mentioned as the "father of feminism," or at the very least as the central figure in the debate on women and society. Unfortunately, these beliefs tend to marginalise women's contributions to feminism and displacing them from history. Despite this, Qasim Amin cannot be disregarded, as he did have a substantial impact. His book, *The Liberation of Women* (1899-Arabic Edition) inaugurated the very public debate between men about women's rights and roles in society.[26] For the public, Amin became the centre of attention for several reasons: as a lawyer and judge he was respected; as a man—a Muslim man—he had a license to speak and be heard in ways women feminists did not; and, finally, his book was published in Arabic and called on Islamic arguments, ensuring a wide readership.

Amin's writings reflected the social, political, economic, and cultural upheaval taking place in Egypt. The general thesis of his book was focused around the

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[25] *Ibid.*, p. 175.
[26] Badran. (1989), p.159.

need for a cultural and social transformation to bring Egypt into the modern age. To achieve this transformation, it was necessary to improve the position of the Egyptian woman:

> When the status of the nation is low, reflecting an uncivilised condition for that nation, the status of women is also low, and when the status of a nation is elevated, reflecting the progress and civilisation of that nation, the status of women in that country is also elevated.[27]

To facilitate this religious and national regeneration, Amin called for an end to female seclusion and veiling. He argued that these had nothing to do with Islam and were a hindrance to the progress of society, because women could not be productive members as long as they were secluded. Interestingly, decades before the publication of his book, women recognized the fact that veiling had more to do with economics than specific requirements of Islam.[28] Amin also denounced the flagrant abuse of institutions like divorce and polygamy, and demanded that women be educated in order that they may become better wives and mothers.[29]

Amin's writings were met with major opposition and public debate quickly ensued, especially around the issue of veiling. Muhammad Ta'lat Harb represented this vehement opposition to Amin's views. He was a lawyer who exemplified a new class of Western educated professionals that filled the ranks of the lower-level jobs of the state bureaucracy. Harb's response to Amin's writings came in the form of two books in which he stated that he was not opposed to women's education, yet was vehemently against any loosening of restrictions on women's movement in society. He viewed veiling and seclusion as necessary to a family's honor, which he claimed was dearer to a

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[27] Amin, Qasim. *The Liberation of Women.* (Cairo: University of Cairo Press, 1992), p. 6.
[28] Badran. (1989), p. 158.
[29] Amin, p.12.

man than life itself. Liberty for women would extinguish chastity, bringing chaos and dishonour to the family. In terms of education, the only type a woman could need was that which would allow her to better manage a household and properly train children.[30]

The arguments of both Amin and Harb occurred within an Islamic framework. Amin argued that women's unveiling and contributing to the welfare of the state was within the guidelines of Islam. Harb argued that the Koran, the traditions of the Prophet, and the early exemplars of the Faith are unanimous in their support for the continued seclusion and veiling of women. Though their debate took place nearly a century ago, it is still reflected in contemporary discourse.[31]

The Growth of the Women's Movement

The first two decades of the twentieth century saw the movements of women's and men's feminism, develop alongside each other, with men carrying on the public debate, and women becoming increasingly active in both social and political work. Middle and upper class women were working together and more women were becoming educated. One example of this was the women's lectures that were given at the new Egyptian university. They were sponsored by upper class women and given by middle class activists Malak Hifni Nasif, Nabawiyya Musa, and Mayy Ziyada. These same women were also active in other areas, expanding the reaches of feminism. Musa was a life long teacher and school administrator who argued for women's education and petitioned the wealthy women to finance schools for girls.[32] Nasif was the first woman to

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[30] Cole, Jaun Ricardo. "Feminism, Class and Islam in Turn-Of-Century Egypt," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. November 1981, pp. 402-403.

[31] *Ibid.*, p.404.

[32] Badran. "Independent Women: More Than a Century of Feminism in Egypt," *Arab Women: Old Boundaries, New Frontiers*. (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), p.134.

make public feminist demands in Egypt when she drew up ten points to be presented to the Legislative Assembly. These "points" however had to be presented by a man as women were not permitted in the assembly. They included what she considered the basis of reform for women: religious teachings, the right to enter the mosque, and education in the areas of medicine and teaching.[33]

The period in which these "feminisms" developed was a dynamic time for Egypt. Between 1883 and 1914, Britain had developed an efficient administration that was relatively free of corruption and created a productive fiscal policy. By the time World War I began, Egypt was stable and had a Legislative Assembly, though it possessed little actual power. This, combined with a free press and a liberal atmosphere provided a powerful forum for discussion and independent thought.[34]

In 1914, just after hostilities broke out between Britain and Germany, Britain declared Egypt a protectorate, formally detaching it from the Turkish suzereinty. The government tolerated the move, though barely, as the Declaration included a clause stating possible future self-government.[35] In many sectors of society, though, nationalist sentiment built as Britain requisitioned buildings, crops and animals, placed vast numbers of foreign troops in Egypt, conscripted 1.5 million Egyptians in the Labour Corps, and above all, brought Egypt into a war with the Sultan. For many land-owners and some of the larger merchants, the war brought fortunes, but for the average man and woman, it brought misery.[36]

As a result of this increase in nationalist sentiment, by 1919 the nationalist movement was in full swing. Feminists and nationalists, men and women, joined

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[33] Ahmed. (1982), p.161.
[34] Vatikiotis, P.J. *The Modern History of Egypt*. (New York: Frederick A Praeger, 1969), p. 239
[35] *Ibid.*, p. 243.
[36] *Ibid.*, p. 246.

together to fight for independence. During this period in history, feminism called for women to take on larger public roles. It was not associated with a specific organized movement or ideology, but instead it reflected a general philosophy of improving women's overall position. This movement was supported by liberal male nationalists and generally tolerated by others as long as it served their purpose of attaining independence. Once independence occurred in 1922, feminists found their demands for recognition put on the backburner as former male pro-feminists began to concentrate on advancing their political careers.[37] The result was a more radical feminism.

The Egyptian Feminist Union was founded in 1923 with Huda Sharawi becoming the president. The first woman to actually call herself a feminist, she was born in the late nineteenth century when women began exploring their feminist consciousness. Sharawi came from the same harem culture as these early feminists and would have likely been influenced by their writings. Coinciding with the founding of the EFU, Sharawi and her close friend Saiza Nabarawi unveiled publicly at a train station on their return from their first feminist conference abroad.[38] While this was a significant event, unveiling was not part of the early agenda of the feminist movement and Sharawi did not advocate it as necessary for women's liberation. In many of the pictures taken of Sharawi, she appears with a modest scarf covering her hair, much the same as contemporary Islamist women.

This attitude of women feminists is in direct contrast to the men's feminist movement that strongly advocated women's unveiling as crucial to the modernisation of Egyptian society. Rather, women associated with the movement decided for themselves

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[37] Badran. "Competing Agenda: Feminists, Islam and the State in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Egypt," *Women, Islam and the State*. Deniz Kandiyoti ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), p.207.

[38] Badran. (1989), p. 165.

when it was best to unveil, if they did unveil at all. In fact, early feminists Malak Hifni Nasif and Nabawiyya Musa cautioned against unveiling to prevent the harassment of women. Nasif, stated in a speech that, "I wonder how you [men who advocated unveiling] can order us to unveil at a time when we are still subjected to rude stares and remarks deeply embarrassing to us when we walk down the street."[39]

The EFU was active in several different areas of society. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Union concentrated on reforming the family's legal structure and calling for controls on male excesses and abuses. The EFU's success was in many ways limited, as political representation and suffrage were not granted. Several reforms were introduced though, which infringed on the Personal Status Laws in the sharia and religious courts. A series of legislative acts, introduced between 1923 and 1931, addressed the abuses involved in child marriages, reformed the easy form of divorce by repudiation, and placed more restrictions on polygamy.[40] The legal reform demanded by the feminists did not sit well with conservative Islamic authorities. A further disconcerting fact was that by the 1930s, women began to enter the universities. Conservatives in parliament and religious leaders strongly objected to co-education and with a great deal of encouragement from these same authorities, male students found themselves demanding sex-segregated universities and colleges. Despite this, women continued to attend.[41]

During this time, despite the fact that feminists were becoming more militant and visible in public life, they still set their demands for political, social, economic, and legal rights within the framework of Islam. One contemporary of Sharawi's noted that she and the EFU very carefully based their demands for social

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[39] Badran. (1988), p. 23.
[40] Vatikiotis, p. 307.
[41] *Ibid.*, pp. 306-307.

reform on the spirit of the Koran and did not promote reforms that did not have Islamic sanction. As an example, she points out Sharawi's claims for equality of education for girls have been based on the teachings of the Koran. In her protest against polygamy, she recognised the exceptions of adultery, childlessness, and incompatibility.[42] Sharawi and the EFU did not challenge the notion of the family built upon the distribution of complementary rights and responsibilities as defined by Islam. They accepted the different gender roles in the family, but demanded equality in these differences.[43]

In phrasing their demands within an Islamic framework, the feminists were using the tools Muhammad Abduh had given them when he called for independent inquiry (ijtihad). The women went to the original sources and determined for themselves that their rights were being violated and that they had the prerogative to fight for them. They did not see their feminist identity in conflict with their Islamic identity.

Despite this continued focus on Islam, by the late 1920s, many viewed feminism as a foreign ideology. The upper classes began to adopt Western manners in dress, language, and everyday expression.[44] It was not until the 1970s, 80s, and 90s that the opponents of feminism raised questions of cultural authenticity. The association between Western imperialism and feminism began in the 1920s and has continued to haunt the Egyptian feminist movement. This issue of authenticity would later go hand in hand with the contentious subject of secularism, which in many cases assumed the complete eradication of religion. But for most Egyptian feminists in history, and in contemporary times, this is simply not the case, though accusations of this kind were, and still are, made.

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[42] Woodsmall, Ruth. *Moslem Women Enter a New World.* (London: Allen Press, 1936), p.404.
[43] Badran. (1995), p. 125.
[44] Badran. (1991), p. 209.

By the late 1940s and early 50s, class and ideological schisms found their way into the EFU, and the demographics of the organization began to change. As younger middle class women joined, the EFU found renewed credibility. They began reaching out to the working class women to teach them their rights, politicize them, and give them the tools to organize, thus creating a larger social base for the organization and providing greater legitimacy for their activities.[45] Other activities in which they engaged included fighting prostitution and alcohol, opening a school for girls, creating a dispensary for poor women, and forming a daycare for working mothers. All these activities encouraged the mixing of women from different classes and social backgrounds.[46]

In the 1940s the backbone of the EFU evolved from a predominantly upper class organization into a middle class one. Many of these women did not feel that the EFU was radical enough in its fight for women's rights. Several other organizations sprang up, including socialist, communist, conservative, and more radical groups like Doria Shafik's Bint al-Nil Union, founded in 1948.[47]

Doria Shafiq was a remarkable woman. Her actions brought feminist demands further into the public eye as she marched on parliament demanding suffrage, was jailed, released, and then staged a demonstration in front of Barclay's Bank to protest the British presence. During her lifetime she organized several hunger strikes, ran for parliament illegally, corresponded with UN officials demanding that human rights be protected, and lectured around the world.[48]

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[45] Khater, Akram and Nelson, Cynthia. "Al-Harakah al-Nissa'iyah: The Women's Movement and Political Participation in Modern Egypt," *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol. 11, no. 5, 475.

[46] Badran. (1995), p. 100.

[47] Khater and Nelson., p. 468.

[48] Nelson, Cynthia. *Doria Shafik, Egyptian Feminist.* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 1996), pp. xi-xxvi.

From the time of independence in 1922 to the late 1940s, Egypt's domestic politics had been characterized by multiple governments in competition for power with the constitutional monarchies of Fuad and Farouq, both of whom aimed to govern and reign. This was in direct conflict with the ambitions of the popular Wafd (the nationalist party) and other political organizations. Despite the hostility between the two parties, the relatively liberal secularism and attempts at modernization permitted, and even encouraged, social and political groups to spread their ideas and agitate for change without a major fear of persecution. A second area of debate among most members of society, which had continued since before the turn of the century, was over the relevance of religion and religious institutions. This was part of a wider debate over the sources of legislation for a modern independent state like Egypt, and whether to control, reform or abolish traditional institutions.[49]

This debate over the supremacy of secular liberalism over all other types of government came to a head as the Second World War loomed over Europe. The war between Fascism and Nazism and the Western democracies broke the grip that Britain had on Egypt. Heralding this new political situation was the swift appearance of new social and political organizations, many of which shared the view that force was needed to attain political goals.[50]

The Growth of the Islamist Movement

The Muslim Brotherhood was one of these organizations that began to advocate violence. In the beginning, the Brotherhood, founded by Hasan al-Banna in 1928, was a movement for the reform of the individual and social morality in general.

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[49] Vatikiotis, p. 299.
[50] *Ibid.*, p. 315.

The members believed that society was fraught with ills because Muslims had turned away from the true Islam of the golden years. They believed nationalism was not enough, and that Muslims need to look beyond the nation to a community defined within the limits laid down by religious law.[51] As al-Banna once stated:

> You are not a benevolent society, nor a political party, nor a local organization having limited purposes. Rather you are a new soul in the heart of this nation to give it life by means of the Qur'an. . . If you are told that you are political, answer that Islam admits no such distinction. If you are accused of being revolutionaries, say, 'We are voices for right and for peace in which we dearly believe, and of which we are proud. If you rise against us or stand in the path of our message, then we are permitted by God to defend ourselves against your injustice.'[52]

Al-Banna was reaffirming the political nature of Islam and the need for political action to realize an Islamic state. He did not reject modernization or technology, as they were necessary for the progress of the community. Rather, al-Banna fought the Westernisation and secularization of Muslim society, thus he continued to denounce the foreign domination of Egypt and other Muslim countries.[53] Throughout the 1930s, the Muslim Brotherhood built up its organization, which consisted of professionals, students, the poor urban masses and provincial town and peasant masses,[54] portraying itself as an alternative to secular politicians.[55] In the 1940s, the Brotherhood formed the "secret apparatus" and began to acquire weapons.[56] Angered by the general political situation, the war in Palestine, and the resultant Arab-Israeli armistice talks, the Muslim Brotherhood took action. They engaged in several confrontations with officers of the

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[51] Hourani. (1983), p.360.

[52] Hasan al-Banna as quoted in Hourani. (1991), p.348.

[53] Esposito, John L. "Introduction," *Voices of Resurgent Islam*. John L. Esposito ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983.), p.10.

[54] Vatikiotis, p. 316.

[55] El Guindi, p. 473.

[56] Kepel, Gilles. *The Prophet and the Pharaoh: Muslim Extremism in Egypt*. (London: Al Saqi Books, 1985), p.246.

Nasser Group, a prelude to later battles, and assassinated a judge. By 1948, the Brotherhood was dissolved on charges of "attempts to overthrow the existing order, terrorism and murder." Not long after, the political police assassinated al-Banna.[57]

In 1952, after years of riots and demonstrations Nasser's Free Officers took control of the nation by a coup d'etat, signaling the end of the constitutional monarchy. This event marked a change in the direction of Egyptian politics: the press was nationalized and critical journalists silenced; political parties were abolished; and student agitators were purged.[58] The government's desire to appeal to all strata of society led to a crackdown on any group or ideology that would garner public support at the government's expense. By 1956, all private organizations, feminist and otherwise, began to collapse under the extreme pressure of the government. The state co-opted all of the women's organizations and placed them under the Ministry of Social Affairs.[59] Ironically, in 1956, while women's groups were being suppressed, women finally received the right to vote (on the condition of literacy). Unlike the men, though, they were not obligated to vote. The reason for this sudden decision was the government's desire to silence feminist demands for equal political rights without alienating the more conservative elements of society.[60]

The revolutionary government under Nasser developed a national ideology that came to be known as Nasserism, or Arab socialism. It was a system half way between Marxism and the domination of the classes that owned the means of production. This soon entailed the public ownership of communications and other public services,

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[57] *Ibid.*, p. 247.
[58] Hopwood, Derek. *Egypt: Politics and Society 1945-1981.* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1982), p. 40.
[59] Nelson, pp.xxv-xxvi.
[60] Khater and Nelson., p. 476.

banks and insurance companies, heavy and medium industry, and foreign trade.[61] Education and health benefits were more evenly distributed among the classes and throughout rural Egypt. University education was free for men and women and all graduates were guaranteed employment. While these moves proved to be advantageous to women, especially in the area of education, the Personal Status Laws remained the same.[62] Women were no longer permitted to organize politically, yet they were able to keep their feminism alive independently. Details regarding their individual activities at this time are sparse. What is known is that feminism resurfaced relatively intact after the death of Nasser.

During Nasser's regime, the Muslim Brotherhood experienced a period of extreme instability. The government alternately tolerated their activities or brutally suppressed the organization. The government considered the Brotherhood to be its greatest opponent and attempted to co-opt it in order to gain the support of its many devotees. The government began by declaring a general amnesty for all political prisoners, which consisted mainly of Muslim Brothers who had been the principal terrorists of the previous decade.[63] The government then offered to bring the Brotherhood into the government, but the offer was rejected by Judge Hasan al-Hudaybi, the new Supreme Guide.[64] Between 1952 and 1954, the Muslim Brotherhood was dissolved and then legally authorized to operate several times, although the government launched a press campaign to weaken the Brotherhood's popularity. This relationship of confrontation/ appeasement came to an end when a Brother attempted to assassinate Nasser. Two months later, six men were hanged and hundreds were imprisoned. From

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[61] Hourani. (1992), p. 406.
[62] Badran. (1993), p.139
[63] Vatikiotis, p.381.
[64] Kepel, p. 247.

this point on, the Brotherhood would be violently repressed.[65] The oppression of the Muslim Brotherhood by Nasser did not completely destroy the stream of thought begun by al-Banna and his followers. As Gilles Kepel points out, during the three decades of rule by Nasser and Sadat, the state had to resort to firing squads and the gallows to silence Islamist militants.[66]

Two central figures emerge in the 1960s that greatly impacted the Brotherhood—Sayyid Qutb and Zaynab al-Ghazali. Both influenced the direction the Brotherhood would take over the next thirty years. Qutb became the ideologue of the Islamic revival in the difficult years of the persecution of the Brotherhood. He was arrested in 1954 and sentenced to 15 years of hard labour. He served 10 years, was released, then two years later he was arrested and hanged.[67] In the 1960s, there was a polarization of ideologies in the Brotherhood. Some of the leaders were willing to compromise with Nasser's government and temporarily accept the regime. Other members of the Brotherhood repudiated any society, other than an Islamic one. Qutb articulated the views of this latter group when he defined the Islamic state in very uncompromising terms in his 1964 publication of *Signposts* (also titled *Milestones*).[68] The book was extremely popular and denounced all existing governments as un-Islamic and claimed that jihad was necessary. It was after the publication of *Signposts* that Qutb was arrested for treason and executed.[69] As the Muslim Brotherhood gradually reorganized, *Signposts* became its manifesto.[70] Qutb's writings and martyrdom signalled

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[65] *Ibid.*, p. 248.
[66] *Ibid.*, p. 27.
[67] Haddad, Yvonne. "Sayyid Qutb: Ideologue of Islamic Revival," *Voices of Resurgent Islam*. John L. Esposito, ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 78.
[68] Hourani. (1992), p. 446.
[69] Shepard, William, E. *Sayyid Qutb and Islamic Activism: A Translation and Critical Analysis of Social Justice in Islam*. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), p.xvii.
[70] Kepel, p. 28.

the renewal of Islamic thought which has continued to influence the contemporary generation of Islamists.

Hundreds of Brethren were arrested during this time, and as many of them were released from jail, they found themselves and their families destitute, at which point the Association of Muslim Women, led by Zaynab al-Ghazali, stepped in to provide for them. Al-Ghazali was a crucial factor in the reorganization of the Brotherhood. She met with exiled leaders, was a link between Sayyid Qutb and his followers while he was in jail, and held a series of "religious" lectures and seminars in her home.[71]

The Association of Muslim Women was started by Zaynab al-Ghazali in 1937. Ironically, she originally was a member of the EFU.[72] Al-Ghazali later left the organisation because she did not agree with many of the ideas propounded by the EFU, although she was likely influenced by what the EFU was trying to accomplish.

Originally her Association worked with the Brotherhood, yet remained independent until al-Ghazali made a pledge in 1948 to become more co-ordinated with the Brotherhood. Al-Ghazali claims that by the time her organization was banned in 1964 there were 119 branches of the Association in Egypt with members numbering about three million.[73] This number has been thought to be high, yet there is no way to confirm or deny it. In her own words, Al-Ghazali described the early activities of the Association:

> Our goal was to acquaint the Muslim woman with her religion so she would be convinced by means of study that the women's liberation movement is a deviant innovation that occurred due to the Muslim's backwardness. . . There were lessons for women. The Association also

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[71] *Ibid.*, p. 29.

[72] Hoffman, Valerie J. "An Islamic Activist: Zaynab al-Ghazali," *Women and the Family in the Middle East* Elizabeth Warnock Fernea ed.(Texas: University of Texas Press, 1985.), p.234.

[73] Zuhur., p.45.

maintained an orphanage, offered assistance to poor families, and helped reconcile families.[74]

The focus of the Association was to provide support to the family and keep it united, creating a foundation on which to build a strong Islamic state. Islamist women were obviously very active, as in addition to the activities mentioned above, al-Ghazali's organization provided a strong supportive base to the Islamist movement, especially during the years when the Brotherhood first experienced violent repression.

Very little is known about the beliefs of the Islamists towards women in the early years. It was not until 1952 that a conference was convened among most of Cairo's Islamic associations to discuss the role of women in Muslim society. The conference focused specifically on women and for the first time formally recognized their importance and influence in society. It encouraged a barrage of literature on women referring to them as "the foundation of the virtuous Muslim society".[75]

Sayyid Qutb was one of these writers who addressed the rights and roles of woman within the context of the need to create an Islamic state. His book *Social Justice in Islam* (1949), written and published prior to the persecution of the Brotherhood, details Qutb's ideal of Islamic social justice and how that ideal has been and should be applied.[76] His message was that it was necessary for women to adopt Islamic values, in order to save the nation and facilitate a transition to an Islamic state. Women were warned that the imperialists were destroying Islamic society by encouraging the idea of women's liberation, and it was their responsibility to fight this by becoming dutiful, virtuous and obedient mothers and wives. Qutb wrote of how Islam envisions a division of duties for

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[74] Zaynab al-Ghazali as quoted in Hoffman. (1985), p.235.

[75] Hoffman-Ladd, Valerie J. "Polemics on the Modesty and Segregation of Women," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. 19, (1987), p. 29

[76] Shepard, p. xviii.

men and women, women belonging solely in the private sphere and men dominating the public sphere, while at the same time overseeing women.[77] Qutb's writings represent a large majority of Islamist opinion, both historically and at present.

The late 1950s and 60s proved to be difficult times for all organizations, though more so for the Muslim Brotherhood, as they entailed the greatest threat to Nasser's government. The persecution the Brethren suffered resulted in a larger part for women, with Zaynab al-Ghazali serving as strong role model. Women in her association provided a link between the Brethren whether they were in hiding, exiled or in jail, and cared for the families of these same men. Several of these women went to jail for their involvement. Al-Ghazali was imprisoned and tortured for six years (1965-1972) for her involvement.[78] While Islamist gender ideology of the time (represented by Qutb's writings) advocated that women only concern themselves with the private sphere, the social realities of the time often dictated differently, with women adapting to situations in ways that contradicted traditional Islamist ideology.

The Sadat Regime

With the death of Nasser and the ascension of Sadat there was a shift in ideology, from socialism, anti-Westernism and pan-Arabism to capitalism and a close friendship with the West. The 1973 war and acclaimed victory raised the hopes of the nation and the popularity of the Brotherhood, as it was believed that the victory had been because Muslims had returned to the true practice of their faith.[79]

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[77] Mousalli, Ahmed S. *Radical Islamic Fundamentalism: The Ideological and Political Discourse of Sayyid Qutb*. (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1992), p.54.
[78] Ahmed. (1992), p. 197.
[79] Ajami, p. 209.

Feminism resurfaced with the assistance of Jihan Sadat and the United Nations' Decade of the Woman (1975-1985). Despite this, feminist organisations were closely regulated by the state and the more independent and radical feminism of people like Nawal el Saadawi was kept in check. Generally, two reasons are given for this containment: first, Jihan Sadat needed to portray herself as the supreme advocate of women's rights and keep herself at the centre of attention, and second, President Sadat needed to keep the religious community pacified.[80]

Despite this attempt to keep radical feminism under state control, independent feminists still managed to stay active. The most famous Egyptian feminist, Nawal el Saadawi published several controversial works, signaling the second wave of feminism.[81] El Saadawi, who received her medical degree in the socialist years of the Nasser government, published several highly contentious books on the sexual and intellectual oppression of women and children that took feminism in a new direction.[82] She contended that:

> The personal lives of people and their requirements are the directing and motivating force which are translated in the final analysis into political will, into policies, and into the politics of a country. This personal life obviously includes the intricacies of sex, the relations between man and woman, and the relations of production and the division of labour. Those who see fit to underrate the problems of women, and of sex, ignore or do not understand the principles of politics. It is no longer possible to escape the fact that the underprivileged status of women, their relative backwardness, leads to an essential backwardness in society as a whole. For this very reason it is necessary to see the emancipation of women as an integral part of the struggle against all forms of oppression, and of the efforts made to emancipate all exploited classes and groups in society, both politically and sexually.[83]

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[80] Badran. (1991), p. 222.

[81] Badran, Margot. "Gender Activism: Feminists and Islamists in Egypt," *Identity Politics & Women: Cultural Reassertions and Feminisms in International Perspective*. Valentine M. Moghadam ed. (Colorado: Westview Press, 1994), p. 202.

[82] *Ibid.*, p.210.

[83] El Saadawi, Nawal. *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World*. (London: Zed Books, 1980), pp. 1-2

While raising awareness among many women and men, she has been (and still is) vehemently attacked by conservatives and fundamentalists alike for apparently promoting sexual promiscuity, thereby violating religion. With these books, Saadawi brought into the public arena a subject that many deemed better left alone or ignored. Unfortunately, most fundamentalists and conservatives, men and women alike, have since interpreted feminism as promoting the immorality of women, and by extension, corrupting society. One Islamist woman stated that Saadawi was disregarded completely within the Arab world as her opinions and writings have no relevance. Interestingly enough, this same woman had not read anything by Saadawi.[84] Contrary to this, some women have stated that her writings have made a great impression on their lives and the lives of their friends.[85] It is impossible to determine exactly what sort of impact Saadawi's books have had on women in the Arab world. But what can be said with certainty is that her books have generated debate, which is a step forward in itself. Saadawi, among others less well known, would be at the forefront of a resurgent, organized feminism in the 1980's.

Under Sadat, the Muslim Brotherhood grew once again, as it became an outlet for political opposition. Sadat actually encouraged the growth of the Islamist movement using it as a counter-ideology to Nasser's socialism and to present himself in a religious light. Having permission to resume their activities, the Brotherhood's "publications soon reached a wide audience and helped disseminate the religious idiom as the idiom of political discourse . . . [becoming] the language of political dissent and discontent."[86] The Islamist movement grew in adherents by leaps and bounds.

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[84] Based on a conversation this author had with an Islamist woman.
[85] Badran. (1994), p.226.
[86] Ahmed. (1992), p. 217.

Contributing to the growing popularity of the Islamist movement was Sadat's "open door" policies which encouraged foreign investment that flooded the market with luxury and consumer goods that only the newly rich could afford. This influx of goods was to the disadvantage of those that made their living in the local textile, clothing, and tobacco industries. The rift between rich and poor grew, inflation rose, serious housing shortages occurred, wages were low and there was reduced employment and poor working conditions.[87] The Islam propounded by the Islamists provided an ideology more attractive than Sadat's *Infitah*, or "open door policy." Large numbers of middle and lower class men and women joined the movement in protest against the policies that Sadat had implemented:

> Islamic dress began to spread. Families with strong liberal leanings were shocked when their daughters adopted the new higab and sons grew new beards. The symbolic figure of A'isha legitimised women's participation in Islamic political life. . .[88]

The attraction of women to the cause was clearly visible as the number of women who began to veil in the 1970s rose dramatically. Women like the veteran Islamist activist Zaynab al-Ghazali and the popular Islamist author and journalist Safinaz Kazim became active in recruiting women, organising and spreading the message of Islam. Both public activists supported women's domestic roles and maligned the feminist movement for forcing Western values on the Islamic world. Despite the more liberal attitude towards the Islamists (as compared to Nasser's regime), the activities of Islamist women were carefully monitored by the state. The highly vocal Safinaz Kazim was jailed three times under Sadat.[89]

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[87] *Ibid.*, p. 219.
[88] Zuhur, p. 53.
[89] Badran. (1991), p. 223.

Sadat's policies eventually proved to be his downfall: the deteriorated economic state of the masses; the annulment of student elections which Islamists had won; the peace with Israel; the banning of the Islamist press; and finally, the arrest of 1536 oppositionists. All of these factors, coupled with the success of the revolution in Iran led to the 1981 assassination of Sadat.[90] A more cautious Hosni Mubarak took his place. He would follow the path of his predecessors and keep the peace with Israel, although Israel itself would be kept at arms length. He would continue to rely on America, but the open affection of Sadat's era would end. Instead, Mubarak would "transact [business] with the foreign power and he would do it in a sober way."[91] In addition to releasing hundreds whom Sadat had had arrested, he also made several conciliatory actions to those offended by the former regime's exhibition of modernity:

> Jihan Sadat had become a symbol of just how far her husband had traveled beyond the old world he had come from: She was everywhere, an emancipated, assertive woman, the country's "First Lady," her opinions on a wide range of subjects always at the ready. The new leader would tread carefully. His wife, an educated woman in her own right, would retreat from center stage. The "traditionalists" would be appeased, the culture's sense of proper and improper ways shown some deference.[92]

After thirty years of varying forms of suppression under Nasser and Sadat, Mubarak's government appeared to permit more freedom. Elections were held in 1984, and while they were set up in such a way as to assure a large majority for the government, relatively free discussion of issues was permitted to take place before and after the elections.[93]

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[90] Kepel, p. 251.
[91] Ajami, pp.161-162.
[92] *Ibid*, p.165.
[93] Hourani. (1992), p. 456.

Conclusion

Chapter three has provided the foundations of the feminist and Islamist movements in Egypt. It has distinguished between men's and women's feminism, shown that feminism is indigenous to Egypt, and that feminism was articulated within an Islamic framework. The rise of the Islamist movement created a new outlet for political unrest. Women became part of this movement as specific Islamist associations for women were organized. All of these events occurred within the relatively liberal atmosphere of a constitutional monarchy. With the coup d'etat by Nasser's Free Officers, this freedom was seriously undermined. Nasser's government, while providing women with the vote, free education and employment opportunities, still suppressed both feminist and Islamist organizations. During this period, Islamist women played crucial roles in maintaining a loose cohesion of the Brotherhood, as the men were either jailed, in hiding or exiled. With the death of Nasser, both the feminist and Islamist movement resurfaced. Under Sadat the feminist movement expanded, although it was under the careful tutelage of his outspoken wife, Jihan. Independent, radical feminism also grew, as exemplified by Nawal el Saadawi, who defied the government and continued to find publishers for her controversial work. The Islamist movement also prospered as Sadat used it as a counter-ideology to Nasser's socialism. Islamist women participated in this rebirth, extolling women's responsibilities to their families and recruiting women to the cause.

Throughout this era, Islamist women pushed the boundaries of Islamist gender ideology as seen in their continued fight for an Islamic state, an indication of actions yet to come. During the time that Mubarak has been president, a more relatively liberal atmosphere has encouraged both feminists and Islamists to become very active. In the 1980s and 90s, the Islamist movement has been attracting larger numbers of women

from all strata of society, educated and illiterate, wealthy and poor, employed and unemployed. While the individual reasons for joining the movement may vary, they all have in common their belief that the reason women suffer in today's society is because Muslims have strayed from the true path, and that once Islamic law is implemented, justice will prevail. In response to this, feminists have stepped up their activities, moving out of the cities and into the countryside, in the hopes of appealing to women from all strata of society. Both feminists and Islamist women, while much of the time at the mercy of state policies, have historically played a large role in defining Egyptian society and will continue to do so in the future. The proceeding chapter will follow this continuum of discourses that are shaping women's rights, roles and activities in contemporary Egyptian society.

Chapter 4: Emerging Discourses

Introduction

This chapter will examine the current Islamist gender ideology and its appeal to women; the feminist movement's response to Islamist popularity; and the new "opening up" within the Islamist scholarly community, that is signalling a new gender activism. Over the last century, the evolution of feminist and Islamist discourses has resulted in a plurality of gender images and many intriguing arguments over the rights and roles of woman in Egyptian society. There appears to be no way to bridge the ideological gulf separating the liberal feminists and the Islamists. Even if both groups were to agree that the Koran and the hadith should be systematically analysed to determine the roles and rights of woman, the nature of sacred Islamic history is such that feminists *and* Islamists could find support for their positions. The preceding two chapters demonstrated this range of interpretations of sacred history.

In general, Islamists and feminists would agree on a woman's religious equality with man, and that her relationship with God is no different than a man's relationship with God. As in the past so today, the major area of disagreement is on woman's roles and rights *in society*. The first section of this chapter will explain the contemporary woman's increasing rejection of feminism and traditionalism, and the strong appeal of the Islamist movement. The following section will discuss the feminist response in light of the popularity of the Islamist movement and government suppression of their activities. The final section will look at a new tendency towards liberalism growing within the Islamist movement. While maintaining an ideological distance from each other, the 1990s liberal feminists and the new Islamic reformers have come a few steps closer in their views on woman's rights and roles in society.

The Islamist Movement and its Appeal to Women

The Islamist movement has been attracting increasing numbers of women into its ranks since the 1970s, at the expense of feminism that has been growing in the last 150 years and a widespread conservative traditionalism that has dominated Egyptian society for centuries. Before addressing Islamist ideology, it is important to determine what these other two groups have offered women, and why women are choosing Islamism. The reason for the rejection of feminism is quite simple: since the 1920s, feminism in Egypt has been associated with imperialism. Islamist women (and men) believe that feminism is exclusively Western, and aggressively anti-male. They view feminism as attacking the traditional values of society, and they believe that any woman who associates with feminist groups is helping the West to attack indigenous Egyptian culture and Islam.[1] Following this line of thought, Islamists would also argue that the liberation of women is irrelevant and foreign to a true Muslim, as Islam liberated women over 1300 years ago. Much of the rejection of feminism has to do with the essentializing of culture. Islamists believe that the cultural norms of society are on their side, which leaves the burden of proof of authenticity on feminists.[2] Despite the fact that most Egyptian feminists still operate within an Islamic framework, with the growth of the Islamist movement in the last 25 years, feminism has come to be branded as anti-Islamic. Feminism is also frequently associated with secularism, which is in direct opposition to the ideology of the Islamists whose primary goal is the creation of an Islamic state. The predominant image of a feminist—unveiled, modern, assertive, and employed also has

[1] Badran. (1994), p. 203.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 209.

very little bearing on the lives women from the lower economic classes, who constitute most of the Egyptian population. For many women, feminism is alienating and in their mind, offers them very little in terms of personal empowerment.

Widespread traditionalism has dominated women's lives for centuries. The distinction between Islamists and defenders of traditional Islam is important, for that is what drew many women into the Islamist ranks.[3] The Islamist movement presents itself as more "woman-friendly" than traditional interpretations of the faith. Traditionalists, also known as conservatives, generally assert that the scriptures legislate what custom has long confirmed—the social and legal inequality of men and women. Men are given political, social, economic, and religious superiority over women, because men are strong and women are weak.[4] One man who exemplified this sort of thinking was Ta'lat Harb who spoke out against Qasim Amin's writings on the liberation of women. He claimed it was pointless trying to liberate women, as they were simply not as smart as men:

> All revealed laws agree that the woman is weaker than the man, that she is his inferior in body and comprehension, and that 'men are superior to women.' Thus, men rightfully have supremacy over women. . . and women's submission to men is part of God's order. . . Women were created for men's earthly pleasures and in order to take care of domestic affairs; God did not create them to give opinions or establish policies. If God had wanted to do so, He would have given women courage, intrepidity, chivalry, and gallant audacity, which is not the case.[5]

Many conservatives go beyond a misogynistic interpretation of scripture to search out "pseudo-scientific" reasons for the subjugation of women. They quote such "evidence" as the smaller brain and heart of a female infant compared to the male infant or that in

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[3] Ghadbian, Najib. "Islamists and Women in the Arab World: From Reaction to Reform?" *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*. 12:1, 1994., p. 23.

[4] Stowasser, Barbara. "Women's Issues in Modern Islamic Thought," *Arab Women: Old Boundaries, New Frontiers*. Judith Tucker ed. (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 14.

[5] Ta'lat Harb as quoted in Stowasser. (1993), p. 14.

constitution and physique women resemble children and should be treated as such. Menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth are viewed as polluting, and no value is placed on a woman's ability to reproduce.[6] A woman's role in life is to live out the punishment that Eve was given by God for enticing Adam in the Garden.

Faced with either a decidedly misogynistic traditionalism or an alienating, and for some women, irrelevant feminism, women view the Islamist movement as providing them with an appealing third alternative. It is more "woman-friendly" and speaks to the masses of women in a language that they understand. The dynamic core of the movement consists of students, men and women, consciously and voluntarily joining various Islamist organisations.[7] In the past, most Islamists came from the lower middle classes. But this is changing, as studies have shown they are now coming from a broader economic background, ranging from the lower middle classes to the upper middle class to even the elite.[8] What follows is an analysis of Islamist gender ideology and what it offers women. It is important to note that there are differing views of woman's rights and roles even within the Islamist community. The sources that will be drawn upon include male ideologues, the respected female activist Zaynab al-Ghazali, and interviews conducted with Islamist women. Most of them tend to hold a conservative view of women's place in society.

Education and Work

One of the primary stresses of the Islamists has been the need to educate women, especially in religious subjects. To casual observers, this does not appear to amount to much, yet the importance of a religious education in a society dominated by

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[6] Stowasser, (1993), p. 15.
[7] El Guindi, Fadwa. "Veiling Infitah with Muslim Ethic: Egypt's Contemporary Islamic Movement," *Social Problems*. Vol. 28, no. 4, April 1981., p. 465.
[8] Badran. (1994), p. 203.

Islamic regulations and religiously legitimised cultural traditions, cannot be underestimated. In the 1970s and 80s, when the movement began to attract large numbers of women, the majority of them had come to the city from the countryside with their families in search of better lives.[9] In rural areas, traditional interpretations of Islam dominated life. Attracted by this new interpretation of Islam, religious education gave these women:

> . . . access to the only kind of authority that could override patriarchal authority in traditional settings. Receiving a religious education made it possible for women to enter Islamist circles, to gain self-esteem lacking in their traditional counterparts, and to acquire the confidence to put some limits on the power of their fathers and husbands.[10]

They rediscovered that their consent was necessary in order to marry, that they could negotiate a marriage contract, keep their dower, and pray in the mosque.[11] Bearing children and looking after a family became a noble undertaking and, above all, women were to be respected.

Most Islamists would not disagree with educating women. Zaynab al-Ghazali stated, "women must be well educated and cultured, knowing the precepts of the Koran and the Sunna, knowing world politics, why we are backward, why we don't have technology."[12] For al-Ghazali, the purpose of educating a woman is to make her an informed mother and wife, so that she may raise informed children who will contribute to the formation of an Islamic state. "The Muslim woman must study all of these things, and then raise her son in the conviction that he must possess the scientific tools of the age,

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[9] Hourani. (1992), p. 452.
[10] Ghadbian, pp. 23-24.
[11] *Ibid., p.* 24.
[12] Zaynab Al-Ghazali as quoted in Hoffman. (1985), p. 236.

and at the same time he must understand Islam, politics, geography, and current events. He must rebuild the Islamic nation."[13]

Other Islamists believe that women need to be educated in all areas, so that they can meet the needs of other women. The segregation of the sexes is a fundamental belief of Islamists, yet the social reality is that women are on the campuses, in the streets, on transportation and in the workplace. To maintain modesty and some form of segregation in such situations, women must be trained in all occupations so as to provide services for other women. As an example of this, while conducting research in Cairo, Sherifa Zuhur noticed a bus driven by a woman that only picked up female passengers, apparently not an uncommon occurrence.[14]

The Islamist beliefs regarding education are similar to attitudes towards female employment. Pursuit of a career is frowned upon as it interferes with a woman's primary duties within the home. Al-Ghazali (and most other Islamists) believe that pursuing a career engenders a woman with male characteristics, such as extreme competitiveness and aggressiveness, which are not traits that a woman should possess. A career woman is also more likely to be tempted to neglect her marital and familial duties or to indulge in forbidden vices.[15] Much of the Islamist attitude regarding education and work is based on certain definitions of femininity. Men and women have different temperaments, which demands that they fulfil different roles in life. This helps the "family unit to perform its message [follow God's plan as laid out in scripture] and to emerge as an active and important institution in society."[16] Most Islamists believe that

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[13] *Ibid.*
[14] Zuhur, p. 93.
[15] *Ibid.*, p. 94.
[16] Zaynab al-Ghazali as quoted in Hatem, Mervat. "Egyptian Discourses on Gender: Do Secularist and Islamist Views Really Differ?" *Middle East Journal*, vol. 48, No. 4, Autumn, 1994, p. 673.

men are obligated by sharia to assume the financial responsibilities within the family. If a man fails to do this, he is subject to divine punishment. By encouraging women to take roles outside of the home, the state has created serious problems in the home and work place, and for public transportation and production. If a family is in desperate need for money, or if the Islamic state expresses a need for her labour, then a woman may work as long as she can juggle both her private and public responsibilities, but she must return to the home as soon as possible.[17] Interestingly, most, though not all, of the Islamist women interviewed by Sherifa Zuhur, stated they would continue with their education or careers until they married, at which point they would quit to look after their families which they felt was a woman's most important role. Very few believed that they would combine work and marriage.[18]

The issues surrounding education and work are extremely complicated, as it is not always Islamist ideology, but social and economic realities that dictate whether a woman goes to school or works. Women from the lower and lower-middle classes pursue an education to obtain employment because their husband's wage is not enough to maintain a household. These are the same women who tend to be the most receptive to Islamist ideology,[19] and veiling becomes very important for these women who wish to maintain their dignity and modesty, termed "Muslim ethic" by Fadwa el Guindi.[20] For many of these women veiling also permits them to move about in public more easily.[21] Large numbers of Islamist women, predominantly from the middle and upper classes, are

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[17] Hatem, pp. 673-674.
[18] Zuhur, p. 65.
[19] *Ibid.*, p. 13.
[20] El Guindi, p. 482.
[21] For a discussion on veiling among the lower economic classes, please see Macleod, Arlene Elowe. *Accommodating Protest, the New Veiling and Change in Cairo*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

also enrolled in the universities studying in the traditionally male dominated areas of medicine, law, the sciences, and engineering etc.[22] The implications of this relatively new phenomenon are not yet known, although it can be assumed that having spent so much time and energy attaining an education, very few would be pushed back into the home.

Political Rights

Politically, the Islamic woman is the equal of her male counterpart. As al-Ghazali stated, the Muslim woman must educate herself politically, and participate in the building of the Islamic state, through the education of her children. A woman is also encouraged to vote, be represented and consulted, but again, this cannot be at the expense of her family.[23] The one area that Islamists prevent women from participating in is any position that would involve the exercise of *hukm*, which is rule through judgement (i.e. a judge, issuing fatwas (religious opinions), or ruling a nation). Many theorists base their opinions on a woman's apparent lack of concentration or emotionality during menstruation.[24]

Modesty and Veiling

One of the fundamental features of the Islamist community is the division of space based on sex. This becomes especially critical as women move into public life.[25] Islamist women insist upon public identification of themselves as devoted Muslims with the hijab. Without the veil, they believe that a woman cannot be a true and committed Muslim.[26] One of the most popular books among young Islamist women on the subject

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[22] Zuhur, p.113.
[23] *Ibid.*, p. 98.
[24] *Ibid.*
[25] El Guindi, p. 482.
[26] Badran. (1994), p. 206.

of modesty and veiling is by Ni'mat Sidqi, entitled *al-Tabarruj* (no date given).[27] Sidqi believed that God punished her for her immodesty and lack of compliance with the Sharia by afflicting her with a painful infection of the gums. Through this horrible experience, she came to realise her mistakes and rectified them by donning the hijab and returning to Islam. After quoting several Koranic verses and Hadith which Sidqi interprets as advocating the veil, she claims:

> In order to preserve society from the harm of tabarruj, and to protect the bodies of women from immorality, and their lives and chastity from corruption, and to remove temptation and capitulation to it from the souls of men, God the All-Knowing and Wise forbade women to display their bodies. He, be He exalted, is most knowledgeable of the weaknesses of men and the recklessness of youth.[28]

The immodesty of the mixing of the sexes is considered to be a reflection of Western values that have invaded Egyptian society, resulting in immorality, corruption, and materialism.[29] Western television programs like "Dallas" or "Falconcrest" are widely viewed within Egypt and the Islamists have had to respond to these cultural messages.[30] For the Islamist community the veil is a rejection of Western values and an expression of support for the Islamist formulation of honor, modesty, justice and sanctity of the family. The women who wear the hijab consider themselves representatives of cultural authenticity.[31] In the past, a complete segregation of the sexes was considered necessary and to some degree possible with the upper classes within the harem system, where women were not required to work to support the family. The social and economic reality of contemporary times makes this impossible for the majority of Egyptian families that

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[27] El Guindi, p. 29. (al-tabarruj is a Koranic word referring to the display of the female body).
[28] Ni'mat Sidqi as quoted in Hoffman-Ladd. (1987), p. 30.
[29] El Guindi., p. 476.
[30] Zuhur, p. 130.
[31] Badran. (1994), p. 203.

need a second income to survive. For Islamists, veiling is crucial in Egyptian society to maintain their version of virtue where unavoidably, the sexes come in contact with each other on a regular basis.

The discourses surrounding the veil are multi-faceted and complicated. For the purposes of this thesis, the most important aspect of the veil is that, for Islamist women, they believe it to be empowering and addresses many of their needs. Following from interviews she conducted with Egyptian women, Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad has divided the reasons for wearing the veil into several different categories:

> *Religious*—an act of obedience to the will of God as a consequence of a profound religious experience;
> *Psychological*—an affirmation of authenticity, a return to the roots, and a rejection of Western norms;
> *Political*—a sign of disenchantment with the prevailing order;
> *Revolutionary*—an identification with the Islamic revolutionary forces that affirm [sic] the necessity of the Islamization of society as the only means of salvation;
> *Economic*—a sign of affluence, of being a lady of leisure;
> *Cultural*—a public affirmation of allegiance to chastity and modesty, of not being a sex object (especially among unmarried working women);
> *Demographic*—a sign of being urbanized;
> *Practical*—a means of reducing the amount of money to be spent on clothing. Some respondents claimed that they were receiving money from Libya and Saudi Arabia for the purpose;[32]
> *Domestic*—a way to keep the peace, since the males in the family insisted on it.[33]

Added to this, Fadwa El Guindi noted that society has been experiencing rapid social change since the 1950s. As women move into all areas of public life, they are more likely to be harassed by men who feel that women are invading "their space."

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[32] A female student at Cairo University claimed to have received a sum of money to hand out head-kerchiefs to her class-mates, and more money for every woman she converted to wearing Islamic dress; money which came from a Saudi source. Williams, John Alden. "Veiling in Egypt as a Political and Social Phenomenon," *Islam and Development: Religion and Socio-political Change*. John L. Esposito, ed., (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1980), p.81

[33] Haddad, p. 294

Many of these same harassers claim that women have brought it on themselves by choosing to be there:

> Therefore, a woman in public has the choice between being secular, modern, feminine and frustratingly passive (hence very vulnerable)[34], or becoming a mitadayyinan (religieuse)[a veiled Islamist woman], hence formidable, untouchable and silently threatening. The young women who are now in public, and because of social change will remain there, made the choice and it became a movement.[35]

Aside from the women who are forced to work for economic reasons, there are also a large number receiving an education and finding employment that *choose* to be actively involved in public life. For these women, a number of factors appear to have influenced their decision to veil: a religious awakening; the practical considerations of moving about in public; the need to reaffirm her Egyptian/Islamic/Arabic identity in the face of confusing foreign influences; the economic factor of not having to pay for an expensive wardrobe; and/or as a sign of opposition to the current government and prevailing social situation and support for the Islamist movement. Sherifa Zuhur's research found many of the same reasons for veiling, yet the predominant response was for moral reasons. The women she interviewed attempted to minimise any other motivations, indicating that they were placing the highest value on the moral rationales. Taking into account all of these explanations for veiling, the women who wear the hijab feel it has empowered them in many spheres of life. One can begin to understand the vehemence with which Islamist women respond to the predominantly Western claims that they are oppressed by men and Islam when they are "forced" to veil.

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[34] The author provides no explanation as to why these unveiled women would be "frustratingly passive".

[35] El Guindi, p. 481.

The Family: Harmony Within the Marriage

Islamists, male and female, place paramount importance on the cohesion of the family, as the basic unit of the Islamic community. Every man and woman must marry unless they have an illness. A woman's "first, holy and most important mission" in life is to tend to the needs of her family, as wife and mother. If she is able to fulfil her duties and finds that she has free time, a woman may participate in public activities.[36] The sorts of public activities encouraged by the Islamists would include recruitment of new members (female) and charity work.

Most Islamists do not subscribe to the view of absolute equality of the sexes, but instead emphasise the distinct biological nature of the sexes and complementary sex roles. The Koranic exegete, author, literary scholar and professor A'isha Abd al-Rahman claims that,

> We, the free modern women, believe that men and women mutually complete each other, and each needs the other to realise his or her complete existence. . . [yet] recognising that man has his legal and natural rights over her.[37]

These legal and natural rights are based on the responsibility of the man to provide for his family. If a man violates the stipulation of supporting his wife and family, his right to authority collapses. The importance the Islamists place on the dictum that a man is ultimately responsible for providing for his family would appeal to most women as it guarantees her and her children some semblance of security.

Many moderate leaders have acknowledged that children need more of a male presence within their lives. The new Muslim man is encouraged to participate more

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[36] Hoffman. (1985), pp. 233-254.
[37] Hoffman-Ladd. (1987), p. 36.

actively in the raising of children, who need the love, attention, and discipline of both parents. Despite this however, the mother is still the primary caregiver during a child's early years.[38] Zuhur believes that this is a response to the increasing rate of "father-absent households"; a result of the migration of men to other countries in search of work.[39] This concept of a closer family would be attractive to women who have had to take on all of the childcare responsibilities.

All factors which threaten the family, and therefore the community must be eradicated. Sexual temptation must be controlled through laws, the wearing of the hijab, limitations on the mixing of the sexes, peer pressure by fellow Islamists, and self-discipline.[40] Issues like adultery and prostitution must be dealt with harshly, by imposing the sharia, particularly the *hadd* punishments (e.g. punishments for adultery and false accusation of adultery).[41] Interestingly, self-discipline of the male is rarely mentioned. In most writings on virtue within society, the primary responsibility for sexual morality falls to the female.

In general, the Islamist image of the woman is quite conservative as compared to liberal feminist interpretation, yet offers a freedom and respect unknown among traditionalists. Above all there appears to be a certain security offered by the Islamist ideology that would be remarkably appealing in an economically, politically and socially unstable country like Egypt. The movement is focused on creating an Islamic society, the basic unit of which is the family. Within the family, the woman is given a noble role: to bear and educate the future builders of an Islamic society. Education for a woman is necessary, to provide her with the necessary tools to raise her children.

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[38] Zuhur, p. 96.
[39] *Ibid.*
[40] *Ibid.*, p. 88.
[41] Coulson, N.J. *History of Islamic Law*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1964).

Working outside the home is severely frowned upon, except in the case of dire economic circumstances. Islamist ideology appears to be open to diverse interpretations as women adapt it to suit their lives. They are pursuing careers, although many claim that they will quit to raise a family, then possibly return to the work world. To facilitate this migration into public life, traditionally a man's domain, women are donning the hijab, demanding respect and going about their business. Traditional dichotomies of male and female spheres remain, though, and the call to return to the home is being heeded by many women.

The Feminist Response

From the late 1920s through the late 1960s, the ideal image of woman as put forth by the state and many of the upper and middle class feminists has been that of the unveiled modern career woman. By the 1970s this had changed with the growth of the Islamist movement. The 1980s brought large numbers of women wearing the hijab. The Islamist movement has continued to increase in popularity and power well into the 1990s. For feminists this represents a major threat to women's rights. Compounding this are the policies of the state, both past and present. Under Sadat, the government emphasised women's gender differences by arguing for the need for the protective arm of the state to secure for women adequate political representation both as individuals and as a group. Mubarak later abandoned this approach in favour of a definition of sameness, ignoring the disadvantages women face when becoming involved in politics. The result has been the marginalisation of women from the government.[42] Further to this, in 1985 the government revoked Sadat's 1979 amendment to the Personal Status Laws. This

[42] Hatem, p. 664.

combination of state policies and the popularity of the Islamist movement have forced the feminist movement into a defensive mode of attempting to regain support for their goals, both within the government and among the Egyptian population.

The feminist movement has responded to these actions in several different ways. A group of young women (who, as students had been part of the democratic movement of the 1970s) formed an association called the New Woman Group to work with women of all classes. They created *The New Woman Magazine* in order to disseminate their ideas to larger numbers of people.[43] In an open letter, the group outlined its aims:

> We believe in the equal right of men and women to fight all forms of oppression and exploitation, we similarly believe that women's struggle will remain incomplete without their own battles for freedom and equality and their rights to express themselves, to participate in public life and to take their own life decisions, their right to work and to equal pay. . . [to determine] what they want to do with their lives, whether in the public or personal sphere. . . We are working with the objective that the New Woman Group which is one of several democratic women's groups in Egypt will be able to join together the widest possible number of those women interested in the women's question and who work in fields related to women's concerns, interests, and rights and who fight to win those rights.[44]

Another group of women organised a protest movement against the invasion of Lebanon in 1982. These women then went on to form the Society of the Daughters of the Earth and a magazine containing articles by and about women of all classes.[45] The Society works with all classes of people, from peasants to professionals. Their primary goal is to educate women so to help them find jobs and gain some control over their own lives.[46]

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[43] Badran. (1994), p. 218.
[44] New Woman Magazine as quoted in Badran. (1994), pp. 218-219.
[45] Badran. (1994), p.211.
[46] *Ibid.*, p. 220.

One major event, previously mentioned, that helped to galvanise feminist activity in the late 1980s, was the change in the Personal Status Laws. In 1979, with the very strong encouragement of his wife Jihan, a feminist in her own right, Sadat issued a presidential decree amending the Personal Status Laws, giving women more rights.[47] In 1985, under Mubarak, these changes were rescinded. The reason given for the changes was the fact that there was no national emergency that justified the use of a presidential decree to enact this measure while parliament was in session.[48] It is more likely the move was to assuage Islamist groups. The feminist movement reacted by creating a coalition called The Committee for the Defense of the Rights of Woman and the Family. The members, who came from different feminist groups, were successful in lobbying for a reinstatement of the law, although in a somewhat altered form.[49]

Many feminists found their public voices in the organisation of the Arab Women's Solidarity Association, headed by Nawal el Saadawi. The Association is the largest and most vocal feminist group in Egypt. Founded in 1985, the aim of the Association is "the promotion of Arab women and Arab culture in general, politically, economically, socially and culturally – and to consolidate the ties between women in all Arab cultures."[50] The Association recognises the conflict felt by women as they are barraged with two conflicting images of women: the European woman, which does not reflect Arab culture, as seen in the Western media; and the religious veiled woman isolated from public life, which is in accordance with the cultural values of Arab-Islamic

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[47] Zuhur, p. 55.
[48] Hatem, p. 668.
[49] Badran. (1994), p.211.
[50] el-Saadawi, Nawal. "Introdution," *Women of the Arab World: The Coming Challenge, Papers of the Arab Women's Solidarity Association Conference*. Nahid Toubia ed. (London: Zed Books, 1988), p.1.

countries.[51] To combat these contradictions, the AWSA calls on women to study Islam and interpret it with their own powers of rational intelligence, rather than seeing it through the minds of others. If Arab women interpret religion and study it independently, they will understand "why they have been stripped of independence and why male authority was established over them, for these are factors arising from human society, and man-made laws, not from natural or God-given laws."[52] Nowhere does the Association state that a woman must give up her religion or that Islam is fundamentally antagonistic to her liberation. In addition to this, there are no claims that Western society is superior, or that its ideas need to be adopted wholesale. The AWSA places a high priority on motherhood, claiming that it is the highest form of production and a social function for which the state should provide optimum opportunities and support. They also declare that parents need to take equal responsibility for raising children.[53] Overall, the AWSA believes that the Arab woman should be proud of her Arab heritage, not forsake her religion, and have the power to decide her own future.

Since the late 1980s, the government has become very uncomfortable with AWSA activities. In 1990 it prevented one of the AWSA's magazines from being published and in 1991, the Mubarak government shut the organisation down, clearly indicating that feminists in the 1990s have more to contend with than just the Islamists. The AWSA has since taken legal action with the support of the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights, though the results of this appeal are as yet unknown.[54]

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[51] AWSA. "Arab Women's Solidarity Association: Final Report and Recommendations," Toubia, ed., p.153.

[52] el-Saadawi, Nawal. "The Political Challenges Facing Arab Women at the End of the 20th Century," Toubia, ed ., p.20.

[53] "AWSA: Final Report and Recommendations," Toubia, ed., p.153.

[54] Badran. (1994), p. 217.

Today, women's feminist activity does not always take place within the realm of formal organisations, especially considering government suppression. Many women prefer not to identify themselves as feminists, yet support various stands that can be considered feminist. Many of these women find that the classification of "feminist" is too confining, or too exclusive. They believe that labeling themselves as "feminist" disregards the other aspects of their identity (e.g., Egyptian or socialist). Others fear the negative consequences of being associated with feminism because of the conservative atmosphere of the country and family and societal pressures. Yet these "pro-feminists" cannot be discounted, as the contributions they make are important to furthering women's rights.[55] Pro-feminists

> mainly include women who typically are not concerned with ideology but are pragmatists who have carved out lives and careers for themselves and in the context of their professions tend to promote the general interests of women. . . [and] participate in public life through their work and their literary production. They are trying to confront what they see as a menacing regressive environment for women and place their individual work within a larger perspective. Rather than [debate] feminism they address gender issues and explore new directions.[56]

These women include professors, historians, lawyers, development workers, novelists and other professional women. One such woman is Alifa Rifaat. Her short stories have been characterised as "ironic, cruel, and merciless [as they] dissect with an annihilating precision the culturally sanctioned destructive egotism of the Egyptian male."[57] When Rifaat stated her desire to attend university, her family took this to mean that she needed a husband, and quickly married her to her cousin. Her short stories attracted a considerable amount of attention, at which point her husband forbade her to write. Rifaat

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[55] *Ibid.*, pp. 206-207.
[56] *Ibid.*, p. 215.
[57] Ahmed. (1992), p.214.

agreed and did not publish any of her stories, yet continued to write them in the seclusion of her bathroom.[58] The characters in her stories endure loveless marriages, joyless sex, and culturally sanctioned spousal abuse. By writing about the painful yet all too real situations that women face, Rifaat is raising an awareness among her readers and contributing to the feminist movement. Her writings do not question Islam; they question the cultural patriarchy that has taken away women's rights given to them by Islam. If asked, Rifaat would not claim to be a feminist, yet her writings bring to light many of the same issues that Nawal el Saadawi's writings do, though in a much more subtle way.

Another style of informal activism is seen in the actions of a small group of professional women who gathered to produce a document detailing women's legal rights. None of the women belong to an official feminist organization, yet they felt the need to further advance the lives of women in the political, social, and economic spheres at a time when they believe women were being pushed back into the home. Their publication sets out in clear, concise, accessible Arabic, women's rights as they are guaranteed in the Egyptian constitution, state laws and decrees, and international agreements that Egypt has signed.[59] In the opening letter to the document the women state:

> The holy Qu'ran has promoted the unity of the family and love and compassion among its members and has declared that all people come from a single origin, 'Ye, people fear your God who created all of you from one soul'.[60]

Once again, these women are using Islam to support their call for the legal rights of woman, and at no point do they demand that the Egyptian/Islamic woman adopt Western values.

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[58] Badran and Cooke., p. 72.
[59] *Ibid.*, p. 372.
[60] A Group of Women Concerned with Affairs Relating to the Egyptian Woman. "Legal Right of the Egyptian Woman: Theory and Practice," Badran and Cooke. ed., pp.373-374.

Liberal feminism has continued upon the same path it embarked on decades ago: fighting for the rights of women within a secular framework, yet legitimating its demands with Islam. Generally, they believe in a woman's right to work and education, and to choose her own path in life. Like the early feminists, their work includes providing health clinics and participating in development programs. They take the position that religion should be more of an individual and personal matter and promote the idea that a woman should interpret religion for herself. In the face of the increasing popularity of the Islamist movement, feminists, and pro-feminists have kept up their activities, organising conferences, publishing books and magazines and attempting to reach out to women throughout Egypt. Unfortunately, little research is being done on the Egyptian feminist movement of the 90s. Government suppression of feminist organisations makes research difficult; and identifying pro-feminist activities can also be complex, as their contributions are not always obvious or easy to document. What is extremely interesting though, is that there appears to be a new commonality in activism between Egyptian feminism of the late 80s and 90s and a new liberal Islamist movement emerging out of the (still) dominant conservative discourses surveyed previously.

Liberal Islamism?

The 1990s are witnessing a new phenomenon within the Islamist movement. It appears that there is an opening up within Islamist discourses on women, with both male and female scholars advocating stronger public roles for women and stating that their input into public life is not only necessary, but also valuable. This new movement is still relatively small, as the majority of populist (mainly male) Islamist voices continue to

call for women's return to the home. This new movement, termed either liberal or reformist[61] Islam, is significant and deserves a great deal of study, in that it signals a new way of thinking about women and their status and roles in public life within the Egyptian Islamist movement.

Two respected male Islamist scholars have made considerable contributions to this emerging debate. Muhammad al-Ghazali published a book in 1989 that challenges the methodology used by conservative scholars to interpret the basic Islamic texts—the Koran, hadith and the various schools of Islamic law. The book focuses on those verses and hadith that the conservative scholars have interpreted as excluding women from positions of authority. Al-Ghazali concluded that there were several authentic juristic interpretations of Islamic law which allowed women to serve in any public role—as judges, ambassadors, cabinet members, and rulers. The publication outraged many, especially those scholars from the Gulf States, while Benazir Bhutto demanded that it be translated into Urdu.[62] The responses provoked by the book, both positive and negative, clearly points to the large readership that al-Ghazali can generate, and his importance within the Islamic community, a fact which will encourage the circulation of his ideas to large numbers of people, in turn hopefully generating more scholarship.

A second highly respected scholar, Yusuf al- Qaradawi, issued a fatwa (a religious opinion) in which he claimed that women could seek out parliamentary offices, be judges, and issue fatwas with the same authority as men. Turning to the Koran, he mentioned Bilqis, the Queen of Sheba and other female leaders, and stated that "many of them were more astute and competent in politics and administration than many of the

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[61] Ghadbian, p. 27.
[62] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

males—I won't call them men—who rule Arabs and Muslims today."[63] One publication entitled *The Voice of a Woman in Islam* (recent, though a specific date is not available) discusses how women's opinions must be heard and respected. Al-Qaradawi cites several of the more misogynistic hadith claiming them to be false and criticises those imams and scholars who promote such negativity against women. The wives of the Prophet serve as examples of women whose opinions were respected and he mentions that in the Prophet's time women frequently made inquiries in search of his guidance, even while men were present.[64] The idea that a woman could become a political or religious leader is revolutionary for Islamist ideology.

Interestingly, it is not only individual Islamists that are rethinking women's roles; the Muslim Brotherhood has also addressed the rights of the woman in public life. In an official publication the Brotherhood states that there is nothing in the sharia that prevents a woman from electing members of representative councils and similar bodies. They also claim that women are permitted membership in these same representative bodies, if they are elected. In an interesting addendum to this they state that:

> It is argued that women undergo menstruation, child-bearing and labour – a fact which may hamper their performance in the council to which they are elected. But this can be refuted by saying that men also may be subject to misjudgement or illness which may impair their performance.[65]

The Brotherhood assumes that if a woman chooses to run for office, she is not neglecting her husband and children, or that she is past the age of childbearing, whereby her responsibilities at home would have lessened. Essentially, a woman's primary duties are still within the home as a wife and mother, yet if she can juggle both, there are no

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[63] Yusuf al-Qaradawi as quoted in Ghadbian, p. 28.

[64] Al Qaradawi, Yusuf. *The Voice of a Woman in Islam.*, http://www.albany.edu/~ha4934/qaradawi.html

[65] The Muslim Brotherhood. *The Role of Muslim Women in an Islamic Society.* http://www.albany.edu/~ha4934/ikhwom.html

obstacles to her fully participating in public life.[66] This acknowledgement that women are just as intellectually capable as men to assume public roles indicates a fundamental shift in the belief that men and women are inherently different and that women are destined *only* to function in the domestic realm.

Even more remarkable than the male opinions just mentioned, are the women who are pushing the boundaries of the Islamist discourses on gender. While they may not be considered feminist, their actions and writings speak of an influential new gender activism in promoting women's rights in society.[67] Writer and journalist Safinaz Kazim prefers to view men and women as Muslims, not as gendered beings. Kazim has written for many journals and magazines, promoting women's work and other societal roles and claiming that it is un-Islamic to demand that women quit their work. She continues to remind Muslims that women and men are both crucial members of society and that they must work together. Kazim further argues that there is no "woman question," yet still acknowledges that a woman has to regain the lawful rights guaranteed to her by Islam. These rights include the choice to work, to elect leaders, and to participate in the construction of an advanced Islamic society.[68]

Female Islamists are also making demands of the state to further women's ability to work. In an article published in 1990, Islamist writer Hiba Su'ad al-Din argued that the Islamic path to women's freedom is through politics and that work is a woman's issue. If a woman or members of her family suffer because she works, al-Din believes that it is not the woman who is at fault, but the fault of the state for not providing the proper support systems.[69]

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[66] *Ibid.*
[67] Badran. (1994), p. 202.
[68] *Ibid.*, p. 212.
[69] *Ibid.*, p. 213.

Journalist Iman Mohammed Mustafa's writings echo similar sentiments. Her work claims to show that the children of working mothers suffered and that working women became unproductive both in the home and in the workplace. To rectify this problem, Mustafa openly supported a state proposal that would give working mothers a three-year leave of absence at half pay to look after their young children. A woman would only be permitted to use this right a maximum of two times during her career. Mustafa supported the proposal, but did not believe it should be forced on all women. She also claimed that the state should compensate women for their socially valuable work as family caretakers.[70] The arguments by both Mustafa and al-Din contain elements of Marxism, indicating that many of these new Islamist scholars are fleshing out certain aspects of other ideologies and situating them in an Islamic framework.

This is also seen in the work of Heba Ra'uf Ezzat, a political science Professor at Cairo University.[71] Ezzat is attempting to develop a feminism within Islam. She is examining scriptural sources and religious history to produce an Islamic theory of women's liberation. Ezzat rejects the term "feminism" because she sees it as anti-male, not because of its apparent Western origins. In fact, unlike most of her colleagues, Ezzat actually examines Western feminist writings:

> Feminist questions can be very useful to us. When I read some feminist writings and saw what they were about, they helped me very much and gave me some ideas. . . It is the [universal] humanitarian things that concern me, but what is peculiar to them and is the result of Western ideas or experiences and is not universal, I leave to them.[72]

[70] Hatem, p. 675.
[71] Ghadbian, p. 30.
[72] Badran. (1994), p. 213.

Ezzat is fairly negative about the Egyptian feminist movement. She claims that the EFU wanted to establish the civilization of the Western woman in Egypt and the rest of the Arab and Islamic world. She further states that:

> When women's liberation movements started it was because Muslims had so much trouble in their family life and in society so that they [the feminist movements] had something to say and they were listened to. . . The problem is how can the Islamic movement initiate women's liberation from within? . . . I would like very much to create such a movement. But this movement must liberate the entire society, women and men alike, and not be a separate movement for women. I would like this movement to be on the Islamic agenda.[73]

Ezzat's work may signal the beginning of a new Islamic feminism. As a respected Islamist political science professor, she would wield some influence over her students and perhaps her ideas would be more easily accepted.

This new liberal Islamism is important for a couple of different reasons. Firstly, there is recognition by male Islamists of the valuable contributions that women can make to society, outside of the domestic realm. Secondly, it is a creative way in which Islamist women are reconciling their personal religious beliefs with a desire to be active participants in society and positively affect the status of women. In the process, they are influencing how society in general, including the more conservative religious elements, view women's status and roles.

Conclusion

The contemporary Islamist movement is providing a powerful alternative for women in Egypt. Having to choose between an alienating feminism, or a suffocating traditional interpretation of Islam, the Islamist movement offers a third option that makes

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[73] *Ibid.*, p. 214.

more sense in a world, which for many is confusing and chaotic. It empowers women in a way that no other ideology has been able to so far, using the familiar language of Islam. It is also important to note, though, that Islamist gender ideology does not always reflect the social and economic reality of Egyptian society. In response to this, Islamist women have adapted religious ideology to suit their own needs, an interesting indication that within the Islamist movement and especially among women, there is a flexibility of interpretation.

In the face of this growing popularity of Islamism and continued government suppression, the feminist movement has experienced a decrease in popularity, but by no means have they given up the fight. Their activities are varied as many women choose to openly proclaim their feminism, attracting a great deal of attention from Islamists and the state (e.g. the Arab Women's Solidarity Association). Others prefer not to label themselves as feminists, yet engage in activities that can be termed feminist. Many women, by merely practising in their chosen fields (e.g. doctors, lawyers, professors, etc.), are providing powerful role models for young women. In an effort to transcend class boundaries, feminists and pro-feminists are also making a concerted effort to appeal to women of all economic classes, especially those women more isolated within rural communities. Egyptian feminism has continued in much the same way that it began, legitimating many of its demands with Islam, though within a secular and democratic context.

Interestingly, much the same can be said about the new liberal Islamists. What is so striking about this new movement is that women are at the core of a new group of Islamist scholars that are laying the groundwork for a more progressive interpretation of Islam. Islamist women are becoming more assertive, and joining the

ranks of journalists, scholars and activists in demanding women's rights. They are educated, influential women interpreting the scriptural texts for themselves, and advocating women's right to work and participate in politics in every possible capacity. They are integrating other ideologies and concepts into their Islamic framework and in the process advancing a new understanding of women's rights and roles in Islam. Aside from their writings, the "activist" nature of what they do as journalists, scholars and professors, provides powerful role models for other young Islamist women. The last twenty years have seen the discourse on women take on new dimensions. Women appear to be engaging in common forms of "gender activism" to further their rights within society, while maintaining an ideological distance from one another.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis is to contribute to the growing body of literature examining the controversial subject of women and gender in Islam by looking beyond *Western* writings and assumptions about Arab/Islamic cultures, and examine how Egyptian women themselves were and are taking part in the discourses on their roles and rights. To make this possible it was necessary to use predominantly Arab and/or Islamic sources (in translation) to examine the "self-statements" men and women were making about their society, culture and religion. Based on this study several conclusions about Egyptian society and the issue of women's rights and status can be made.

The study of women's activism in Egypt has actually been a study of power—who has it, how they control it and who wants it. Therefore, the issue of women's rights, status and roles, is about more than just women. The question of women's status in Egyptian society has been subsumed under other issues like nationalism, colonialism, and cultural authenticity, as various elements in society use it to promote their own agendas.

In the face of foreign occupation, nationalists welcomed the help of female feminists in the country's fight for independence. Yet when they achieved it, women's issues were brushed to the side as men began to pursue their own political careers. Nationalists also used the poor condition of the Egyptian woman as proof that Egypt needed to modernize to become powerful like the colonizers. The status of the Muslim woman became a gauge by which to measure the progress of Egyptian society. Most nationalists and modernizers (if one uses Qasim Amin's writings as an indicator), actually had very little regard for the woman as an individual. The idea was to promote the advancement of women (e.g. education) so that a woman could produce educated and

forward thinking children. This view of nurturing the mother for the sole purpose of producing better children is still held by many in Egyptian society. Advocating a woman's rights for the betterment of the individual woman has never been the primary goal.

The traditional religious establishment has taken a different stance, and views any change directed at or by women as threatening the proper religiously-sanctioned social order of society. To take a woman out of seclusion, educate her and let her move about in public life, mingling with men, would wreak havoc. An educated woman would also question the authority of the religious establishment, destabilizing its influence, as seen in the early years of the feminist movement. For the religious establishment, preventing women from acquiring further rights was and is necessary to maintaining their influence and preventing society from degenerating into moral chaos.

Most Islamists have also used the "woman question" to further their own agendas. Their belief is that if women assist in the creation of an Islamic state by being good wives and mothers, their true rights, as laid down in the sharia, would be granted to them. In the face of continued foreign influence through foreign governments, the media, and tourism, women are presented as the bearers of cultural authenticity and Islamic values. The infiltration of "foreign" ideologies like feminism, which advocates individuality, self-sufficiency, equal rights and access to public life, must be stopped for the sake of the Islamic state. There is a genuine belief that if an Islamic state is created, all of society would benefit, including women. Yet the public-private dichotomy and the belief of male supremacy in the Muslim family, remain central to Islamist gender ideology, ideally placing women firmly within the home under the male guardianship.

The state has also manipulated women's rights, addressing the issue in a superficial manner to suit its own needs. It cannot attempt to break down Egyptian patriarchy without endangering its own power base. The majority of Egyptians support the religiously-sanctioned tradition of separate spheres. If the government made a meaningful effort to break these firmly (though not permanently) entrenched barriers down, it would very probably be faced with a revolution. A policy of political suppression and co-option has been implemented over the last century to prevent the development of efficient organizations aimed at furthering women's rights. This has effectively hindered women from fully realizing their potential as a political force for change. Traditionally, the state has also conceded more easily to the demands from the religious community than from feminists, as feminists make up a much smaller percentage of the population. Islamic gender ideology is also much closer to state policy than secular feminism. Therefore, acquiescing to Islamist demands in the area of familial relations and women's rights supports state policies and keeps the government's greatest threat, the Islamists, somewhat pacified.

What has become painfully obvious is that most of Egyptian society and its institutions support the ideal of male supremacy, and have no intention of participating in a movement to break it down. The manipulation of women's rights has proven to be a lucrative political weapon for all of those elements in society previously mentioned, and a genuine support for the advancement of women's rights is lacking in Egyptian society.[1]

To date, only feminists have recognized male supremacy as antithetical to women's rights and openly attacked it. In doing so, they have called upon Islamic

[1] It is important to mention that Western society has also manipulated the issue of Muslim women's status. But the central focus of this paper has not been colonialism and therefore the attack on Muslim societies by Western societies for the treatment of women will not be dealt with.

arguments to bolster their demands. This is a distinct characteristic of Egyptian secular feminism. Most feminists believe that Islam is a personal matter and follow very liberal interpretations of Islamic sacred history, focusing on the many Koranic references to equality between the sexes. They have also rejected the notion of adopting Western values, instead looking inward to Arab/Islamic values to form the basis of their beliefs and demands for change. The use of Islam to support feminist demands is a necessity in a society where religion and religiously-sanctioned cultural traditions (e.g. female circumcision) permeate all aspects of life. To appeal to the Egyptian population, feminists (and other sectors of society fighting for dominance, e.g. the government) must use the language of the masses—Islam. Despite this attempt to use a familiar language, feminists have yet to garner widespread support. Unfortunately, feminism has met with greater resistance as the state, the religious establishment, and Islamists espouse increasingly conservative interpretations of Islam.

Should all of this be taken to mean that Egyptian society is stagnating or regressing in the area of women's rights? No. Despite this overwhelming support for male supremacy, women's activism in Egypt has continued, and appears to be coming from increasingly diverse sectors in society. As pointed out in the previous chapters, women have been active in promoting their rights and interests in different capacities, following varying ideologies for the last 150 years.[2] The result has been two distinct "women's" movements, characterized by two particular ideologies—secular feminism (e.g. Nawal el Saadawi) and, surprisingly, Islamism (e.g. Zaynab al-Ghazali). Between these two ideologies, there are many shades of gray as women adapt ideologies to suit

[2] There is no doubt women have been active for longer than that. Unfortunately, research into women's early activities in the Middle East (and elsewhere) is still scarce.

their own needs, integrating different aspects of feminism and Islamism (e.g. Heba Ra'uf Ezzat).

In the last twenty-five years, as women's activism in Egypt has continued to evolve, many women have rejected secular feminism in favor of Islamism as exemplified by the growing numbers of women adopting the hijab. What must be recognized in light of these events is that women are making an active *choice* to join Islamist groups or embrace Islamist ideology. Islamism does not appear to be something that is forced upon them. Obviously, the government, secular feminism, traditional interpretations of Islam, and/or society in general are not meeting the needs of these women. Consequently, women are turning to the Islamist movement. These new Islamist women are following in a long tradition of activist Egyptian women. Many of these women are hearing the ethical voice of Islam, a voice that encourages them to fight for an Islamic state where they believe justice and fairness could flourish and their true rights as laid down in the Koran would automatically be granted to them.

Ironically, it appears that female Islamists are *actively* promoting an ideology that has consistently relegated them to the private sphere. Yet instead of viewing these women as collaborators in their own oppression, scholars must look beyond surface appearances and acknowledge that Islamist women have brought the "private sphere" of the woman into public life in a way the secular feminists could not. By donning the hijab, thereby following traditional codes of honor and modesty, and becoming active in all areas of life, women cannot be disregarded by the majority conservative population the way the "amoral unveiled women" were and are. Islamist women are pushing the boundaries of traditional Islamist gender ideology and forcing the less progressive elements of Egyptian society to acknowledge their presence in the public sphere by

getting an education, finding employment and becoming publicly active in the fight for an Islamic state. Some Islamist women (and a few men) are also reinterpreting Islamic sacred history and melding it with other ideologies like feminism and socialism, encouraging a liberalization within Islamist ideology. This is an important indication that the Egyptian Islamist movement is not stagnating, but instead is opening up, albeit very slowly. In the process, Islamist women are challenging and undermining from within patriarchal notions that have influenced society for centuries.

While personal status laws have remained the relatively unchanged and the issue of women's rights continues to be manipulated, in the late 1980's and 1990's, there has been a noticeable shift in the public arena as women have increasingly become a political force to be reckoned with. Women are not simply acting out the roles prescribed to them by a misogynistically interpreted Islam. Instead, they are questioning their rights and status in society, demanding social, political, economic and cultural change and actively participating in movements, either feminist or Islamist. Both feminists and Islamists are formulating answers to their own problems, and interestingly, Islam has accommodated them both, showing that Islam itself is an exceptionally dynamic religion.

Having written this, unfortunately a final word of caution regarding Islamist movements is required. Leila Ahmed, in her research on women and gender in Islam, notes that while some interpretations from within the Islamist community are more "woman-friendly", the cases of Iran, Pakistan and especially Afghanistan speak of another interpretation of Islam. All three governments have implemented laws that "directly reflect or are entirely compatible with sharia views as interpreted by establishment Islam. There is every reason to believe that any government declaring itself committed to Islamization, along either Sunni or Shia lines, would introduce similar

laws."[3] Should Egyptian Islamists be successful in their bid for power, it is impossible to say whether women's rights would suffer a major setback. What can be said with certainty, though, is that any state which has claimed to have implemented the sharia has resulted in a theocracy where women are pushed, often violently, back into the private sphere and freedom of action, speech or association is crushed.

[3] Ahmed. (1992), p. 234.

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